On Natural Suffering.

Thesis

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Richard Taylor

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"ON NATURAL SUFFERING" (animal suffering in nature) ABSTRACT

Part 1 surveys writing by previous philosophers on natural suffering.

Part 2 is in three sections. The first two sections investigate two fairly predictable answers to the question "why wouldn't it be a good thing to try to relieve at least some natural suffering?" The two answers are, first, "because that would be to go against nature", and, second, "because that would be to risk harm to the ecosystem". There is a third fairly predictable answer to the question "why wouldn't it be a good thing to try to relieve at least some natural suffering?" Some people would probably say "because the time would be better spent trying to relieve suffering in the human realm". For reasons explained in the third section of Part 2, I evade this answer by positing a situation in which human realm suffering no longer exists. In this situation, where there is more scope for natural suffering relief, I put a new question: "why wouldn't it be a good thing to try to relieve as much natural suffering as possible?" The third section of Part 2 investigates several answers to this further question.

Part 3 considers various "accidental" human effects on levels of natural suffering. I investigate whether these various effects, considered separately, can be thought of as good things, leaving aside the question of whether better things might replace them. For example, what if levels of natural suffering fall by reason of a fall in the number of natural lives? In nature lion cubs, for example, die mostly from starvation (mortality is 80%). If human effect on nature endangers species in which extreme suffering is routine, mightn't such human effect on nature be a good thing?

ON NATURAL SUFFERING

(animal suffering in nature)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

By "natural suffering", I mean animal suffering in nature. This thesis is in three main parts:

Part 1 is a brief survey of some writing on natural suffering contributed by previous philosophers.

Part 2 is in three sections. The first two sections investigate two fairly predictable answers to the question "why wouldn't it be a good thing to try to relieve at least some natural suffering?" The two answers are, first, "because that would be to go against nature", and, second, "because that would be to risk harm to the ecosystem". There is a third fairly predictable answer to the question "why wouldn't it be a good thing to try to relieve at least some natural suffering?" Some people would probably say "because the time would be better spent trying to relieve suffering in the human realm". For reasons explained in the third section of Part 2, I evade this answer by positing a situation in which human realm suffering no longer exists. In this situation, where there is more scope for natural suffering relief, I put a new question: "why wouldn't it be a good thing to try to relieve as much natural suffering as possible?" The third section of Part 2 investigates several answers to this further question.

Part 3 considers various "accidental" human effects on levels of natural suffering. I investigate whether these various effects, considered separately, can be thought of as good things, leaving aside the question of whether better things might replace them.

Part 1

PHILOSOPHERS AND NATURAL SUFFERING

What follows now is a brief survey of some writing on natural suffering contributed by previous philosophers. My survey is arranged in chronological thematic order - themes put in the order in which they were first raised. Within themes, chronological order of contribution applies.

The main focuses of previous writing have been various. For example:

1. Whether natural suffering relief would be absurd.

2. Whether it would destabilise the ecosystem.

3. Whether it would constitute interference in a "foreign" realm.

4. Whether it would be what animals might rationally accept.

5. Whether it can be ruled out by a general suffering relief ethic.

A couple of weak and marginal objections to natural suffering relief have also been raised. I leave these until last.

1. Would natural suffering relief be absurd?

D. G. Ritchie (1) thought natural suffering relief would be self-evidently absurd. Because he thought the granting of animal rights would entail natural suffering relief, he used the supposed absurdity of natural suffering relief as an instrument with which to beat animal rights. If we grant protection to animals against suffering from one source (humans), why not also protect them against suffering from other sources (other animals, the environment)? Actually, the entailment may not follow. For example, we may think it appropriate to regulate the behaviour of human suffering-inflictors. But we may think it simply unworkable to recruit humans to police nature.

Roslind Godlovitch (2) raised another supposed absurdity, this time connected with natural suffering relief by death. She said that where we value an animal life at zero, but we negatively value its suffering, any amount of its suffering indicates that we kill it. If then we are interested in the suffering but not the lives of animals in general, extermination of all animal life is indicated, for all animals suffer at one time or another. This would be negative utilitarianism as applied to nature. But with natural suffering relief by death it needn't follow that we value the life, or lives, at zero. For example, we may want to shoot a buffalo dead if it is being mauled by a pride of lions. But only if it is being mauled by a pride of lions.

It is the Ritchie-type claim of the self-evident absurdity of natural suffering relief which Stephen Clark (3) and Steve Sapontzis (4) have been concerned to rebut. Clark didn't think natural suffering relief would be absurd. Instead, he thought it would be beyond our jurisdiction, and not what animals might rationally accept.

Sapontzis focused on the supposed absurdity of predation suffering relief. He looked at several different types of absurdity, and found that preventing predation fell under none of them. He found, and I agree, that:

1. Preventing predation isn't logically absurd.

2. It isn't factually absurd. (On, say, Mars, or Jupiter, it would be.)

3. It isn't contextually absurd. The context is suffering relief. There may be at least some cases of preventing predation (e.g. putting some animals in good zoos, Sapontzis thought) which would achieve suffering relief.

4. Preventing predation isn't theoretically absurd, because its parent ethic (suffering relief) isn't absurd.

5. Practical absurdity doesn't apply. The example in (3) is practical.

6. Unnatural absurdity doesn't apply. We routinely try to improve upon nature, e.g. to prevent floods, avalanches, erosion, pestilence, diseases.

2. Would natural suffering relief destabilise the ecosystem?

Although he favoured building a few more zoos and putting bells on domestic cats, Sapontzis despite being a suffering reliever gave way easily to one objection to widespread predation suffering relief - that such suffering relief might destabilise the ecosystem. Another suffering reliever, Peter Singer, was likewise opposed to radical natural suffering relief. He said

> ... Judging by our past record, any attempt to change ecological systems on a large scale is going to do far more harm than good. (5)

Only one writer, to my knowledge, has prompted us to question the idea that radical "uncompensated for" natural suffering relief might destabilise the ecosystem. Suppose suffering relief was attempted by an engineered, or allowed, extinction of a predator species without attempt at adjustment elsewhere in the system. Eugene Hargrove expressed a perhaps surprising view that, according to ecological science,

> ... when a species becomes extinct, the system simply adjusts. Some other creature comes forward and fills the ecological niche left vacant ... ecological theory weakens the preservationist case. Claims that current rates of extinction are unnatural and therefore immoral are ... unconvincing, since massive extinctions over short periods of geological time have occurred on many occasions ... (6)

Unfortunately, Hargrove didn't quote any sources or statistics to back himself up. The claim that substitute species always await seems counter-intuitive. For example, hundreds of millions of springboks once populated Southern Africa. Now, lone springboks sometimes wait six months before seeing a herd. (7) Are hundreds of millions of mark two springboks in prospect? It looks unlikely. Perhaps we should treat Hargrove's view with caution. But in any case natural suffering relief needn't go uncompensated for, so needn't destabilise the ecosystem. Eric Rakowski (8) pointed out that prey population control, after predator extinction, could even prove commercially profitable if the meat or skin were in demand.

3. Would natural suffering relief be interference in a "foreign" realm?

Clark (9) objected on other than ecological grounds to natural suffering relief. He raised two fundamental objections. First, such suffering relief would be beyond human jurisdiction. Second, animals might not be rational to accept natural suffering relief.

Clark made the point about jurisdiction by using two analogies. First, he compared species to nations. Second, he compared wild animals to Robert Nozick's independents (10), who have hired no protection agency. For Clark, natural suffering relief could be used as an excuse for extending the hegemony of the human "nation", and could provide an excuse for claiming some sort of protection payment from animal "nations". Wild animals are

not, like domestic animals, long assimilated among the human nation's own "subjects", who receive care and protection and pay for it by the advantages gained from them. Clark opposed human intervention between wild species where, between such species,

> ... there seems to be a settled relationship. (11)

A settled relationship could still include quarrels, because Clark adopted the Nozickian principle that the protection agency's domain

> ... does not extend to quarrels of non-clients among themselves. (12)

Clark's view of things can be attacked by extending one of his own analogies. "Don't interfere in Eastern bloc internal affairs, there's a settled relationship" was exactly the sort of message the Soviet Union often sent to the outside world about its repressive relationships with its former satellite nations in Eastern Europe. If Eastern bloc dissidents, quarrelling with their oppressors but without means of communication to the West, were mistreated, would it have been humane to write them off as non-clients of ours? In nature prey animals' not getting on with predators has even more dire immediate consequences for them than once faced Eastern bloc dissidents, and the prey animals are in principle unable to call for our help. But it doesn't seem to matter for Clark, if they are just non-clients or outsiders. Nobody has reproached Clark better than Rakowski has:

> ... suppose the outsiders in question were ... neighbouring clans in some faraway land - and that the evils ... included torture and murder. Would it really be a matter of moral indifference whether or not we stepped in to halt the bloodshed if we easily could? (13)

4. Would animals be rational to accept natural suffering relief?

In his second paper Clark promoted another criterion for human interaction with other species. He suggested that we

> ... assess our practices by referring to what might rationally be accepted by all parties. (14)

At least here we have a mechanism for assessing what messages animals might send to us if they did have a means of communication. But, unsurprisingly, Clark didn't allow that he might have to deal with messages asking for interference with settled, but painful, natural relationships. Clark allowed that, for example, cattle might prefer domesticity to taking their chances with natural predators, but he thought people would prefer not to be the domestic "subjects" of others. So, unless animals are already irretrievably domesticated, he didn't allow that there are strong grounds not to prefer "freedom" for animals, as he supposed we would prefer it for ourselves. There are at least two problems here. One concerns anthropocentricity. Another concerns Clark's wishful thinking.

First, anthropocentricity. Although putting ourselves in the place of, say, cattle might appear to be putting human interests to one side, in another sense putting ourselves in others' places always involves taking human concerns with us. We are often interested in being free, independent, self-determined. We are often interested in our national or group identities. If like Clark we want to deduce what animals might want, we should be very wary about projecting all these human concepts onto them, or using what might be purely human preferences as a basis for assessment. It would be safer to rely upon known or estimated animal behaviour in actual or projected situations analogous to the comparisons we might want to make.

Take an example of a buffalo in the Masai Mara, a wild cousin of the domestic cow. Would the buffalo be rational to prefer domestication, if on offer, to running the gauntlet of the lions? For Clark it would seem we have to take into consideration our sensibility that we wouldn't like being somebody else's domestic subjects. Since this sensibility is such a strong feature of our own preferences, we would be quite rational to take it into consideration if we were candidates for domestication. But we are not. In this example the buffalo is, and we have no evidence from the behaviour of its already domesticated cousins that they want to escape domestication per se, though they may well shy away from the attentions of keepers who treat them particularly badly, or sense the nearness of the slaughterhouse if the time of their culling approaches, and the methods of slaughter are inhumane.

Of course, one reason domestic cows don't attempt escape from their farms is that they are quite used to them. A newly-captured wild buffalo wouldn't be, and so would quite frequently be straining at its leash, or charging its captors or their fences. At least two more sorts of considerations are then relevant. First, would even this evidence of discontent outweigh the evidence in the wild that buffaloes try hard to escape predators, and if they fail, they are then visibly terrified as they are eaten alive? Second, what about future generations of buffalo? Even if we conclude that present generations would suffer particularly the shock of their captivity, and so on balance be less content, it may be that for future generations domestication would represent an improvement on tooth-and-claw nature.

Clark might want to object that we haven't considered that most domestic bullocks remain just that - we rarely let them grow to be bulls. But here his wishful thinking about nature comes in. I have no figure for buffaloes, but we will see later how the chances of wild animals reaching adulthood are often considerably less than the slightly more than fifty percent chance for domestic cattle. (All the cows, plus a few bulls.) We must face the practical implications of the way natural selection works. Animals in the wild often die early, and as a rule they die horribly. It will take considerable human destruction and cruelty to match these factors where animals suffer at human hands. Even if we put purely human sensibilities about self-determination into the equation, would we, in wild animals' places, so obviously prefer our theoretical freedom to self-

determination, if our freedom from the awful dangers in our habitat was so limited? And in any case, how can wild animals "self-determine"? Barring human intervention they are stuck with the cards dealt to them by nature. If they had human foresight into their chances of suffering, might they not actually prefer not only humane domestication, but even human hunters' bullets? Of course they lack foresight, but I raise the question of whether lack of foresight in the would-be sufferer is justification for our letting the suffering go ahead.

A final consideration. Even if buffaloes opted for domestication, remember Clark referred to "all parties". For example, what might the lions have to say on the matter? Mightn't they object, if their fate is now premature extinction? (Assume it's not economically viable to siphon-off some bull buffalo-meat to feed them.) We might then have a very hard choice. But we might need to consider whether to let some animals continue to live if this maintains suffering elsewhere in the system. (Most lions die of starvation anyway, as we will see later.)

5. Can a general suffering relief ethic rule out natural suffering relief?

The permutations involved in trying to calculate net suffering relief in the last example, and in many others, might be mind boggling. But writers have emphasized that a consistent suffering relief ethic can't rule out natural suffering relief in principle.

Baird Callicot's view (15) was that a consistent suffering relief ethic can't put off at least an attempt at natural suffering relief just by reason of the enormity of the total scope for natural suffering relief. With tongue in cheek, Peter Wenz suggested as a utilitarian policy that predators be eliminated. Further, he suggested that

> ... prey populations can be kept in check painlessly by sterilisation, the control of breeding sites, and so forth, thereby preserving the ecological balance. (16)

We could argue about whether predators actually need to be eliminated, or whether instead prey animals' painful deaths could simply be anaesthetised, for example by the use of tranquiliser dart guns. We could argue that the labour-intensiveness of natural suffering relief, from starvation and disease as well as predation, would make human realm suffering relief a better investment of time and energy. We could argue that we would in any case find few recruits to police nature, so it might be more realistic to look for cases where we can relieve natural suffering simply by letting things go - allowing an endangered predator species to disappear, possibly. But still Callicot and Wenz have a point. Consistent suffering relievers have at least to put natural suffering relief on their list of priorities, if only at the end. On active natural suffering relief Rakowski said

> ... the only sound reasons for inaction are contingent ones. (17)

Rakowski gave as sound contingent reasons for inaction the more urgent concerns of human beings, and the danger of counterproductiveness. But he said the urgency of our other concerns could change, and we could devise ways of circumventing counterproductiveness. So for Rakowski suffering relievers should at least keep active natural suffering relief on their list, in case of these eventualities. But passive natural suffering relief, if constituted say by letting endangered predator species die out, needn't wait for our other concerns to change. We could just let it happen. We might even be able to redeploy present conservation effort into active suffering relief of some kind.

Weak and marginal objections to natural suffering relief

There have been a couple of weak and marginal objections to natural suffering relief. The first was made by Tom Regan (18), and concerns predation suffering relief. It states that predators are not moral agents, so can't be asked not to engage in predation, so there is nothing bad about predation. Sapontzis (19) answered by saying that it is humans, not natural predators, that we might be asking to act morally, to prevent harm; and harm can be inflicted by other than moral agents and still be harm. A small child may not be a moral agent, but if it swings a cat this is still harmful. Callicot, ever pleased to remind animal liberators of the full implications of their own ethic, answered:

> Imagine the authorities explaining to the parents of a small child tortured and killed by a certifiably brain-damaged sadist that, even though he had a history of this sort of thing he is not properly a moral agent ... therefore has to be allowed to remain at large pursuing a course of action to which he is impelled by drives he cannot control. (20)

Above we see a pertinent consideration for the "animal rights" objection to predation suffering relief, made on the grounds that such suffering relief would violate predator animal "rights" to live a normal life. A normal life for a predator includes tormenting and, usually painfully, killing other sentient beings. If this behaviour was taking place among humans, there would be no question of respecting the freedom of the perpetrator to roam, or even to reproduce. Which brings me again to Rakowski, this time on natural suffering relief by sterilisation of predators:

> Suppose that certain kinds of violent criminal behaviour were genetically transmitted from human parents to their progeny, so that the latter were certain to rob, rape, or murder unless kept under close surveillance or confinement. Surely it would not be reprehensible to prevent such people from reproducing if it would cost the community dearly to keep their children under close watch or lock and key. (21)

The second weak objection to natural suffering relief was made by Stephen Bostock. He said

> A tacit admission that wild life must be reasonably pleasant is that no-one would suggest it was cruel or unkind not to capture any animal. (22)

This statement is open to an easy objection. What humans would suggest about the character of wild life is likely to be a very poor guide to its real character. Humans are very prone to wishful thinking (perhaps to keep sane). We like to think we are living in a more benevolent world than is actually the case. We also have a vested interest in not being motivated to do anything onerous about natural suffering, so will be quite pleased to take refuge in a belief that wild life is reasonably pleasant.

Conclusion

My brief survey of previous writing is now complete. Natural suffering relief has been deemed by previous writers to be, variously, absurd, ecologically destabilising, none of our business, (literally) uncalled for, a threat to "animal rights" and, anyway, unnecessary. I hope it has been seen that most of these objections are at least seriously challenged.

Notes

1. D. G. Ritchie, Natural Rights (1894).

2. Roslind Godlovitch, "Animals and Morals", in Stanley Godlovitch, Roslind Godlovitch, and John Harris (eds.), Animals, Men and Morals (Gollancz, 1971).

3. Stephen Clark, "The Rights of Wild Things", Inquiry, 1979, p. 171.

4. Steve Sapontzis, Morals, Reasons and Animals (Temple, 1987), p. 229.

5. Peter Singer, Animal Liberation (Jonathan Cape, 1976), p. 252.

6. Eugene Hargrove, "Foundations of Wildlife Protection Attitudes", Inquiry, 1987, p. 17.

7. BBC wildlife documentary, 5 July 1994.

8. Eric Rakowski, Equal Justice (Clarendon, 1991), p. 365.

9. Clark, op. cit., and in "Rights of the Wild and Tame", Proceedings of the British Association of Nature Conservationists, 1984.

10. See Robert Nozick, Anarchy, State and Utopia (Basic Books, 1974).

11. Clark, Inquiry, 1979, p. 186.

12. Nozick, op. cit., p. 109.

13. Rakowski, op. cit., p. 366.

14. Clark, op. cit., 1984.

15. J. Baird Callicot, "The Search for an Environmental Ethic", in Tom Regan (ed.), Matters of Life and Death (Random House, 1986), p. 398.

16. Peter Wenz, Environmental Justice (N. Y. S. U. Press, 1988), p. 198.

17. Rakowski, op. cit., p. 367.

18. Tom Regan, The Case for Animal Rights (U. California Press, 1983).

19. Sapontzis, op. cit., p. 230.

20. J. Baird Callicot, Book Review on Regan, Environmental Ethics, 1985, p. 370.

21. Rakowski, op. cit., p. 366.

22. Stephen Bostock, Zoos and Animal Rights (Routledge, 1993), p. 71.

Part 2, Section 1

A THING AGAINST NATURE

Why wouldn't it be a good thing to try to relieve at least some natural suffering? One fairly predictable answer would be "because that would be to go against nature". According to this answer, natural suffering relief couldn't be a good thing, by mere definition of it being "a thing against nature". But then it has to follow that, in some sense, nature is good. Can this be true? To try to find out, this section investigates some specific claims for the goodness of nature.

At first it may seem that we have to deal with claims for the goodness of nature from both secular and religious camps, and that this is going to be a complicated business. Not necessarily so, in fact. The claims may be one and the same. Believers in a good God may be committed first to belief in a nature which is good, or which will turn out to be. For if it isn't good, or doesn't turn out to be, then God either might not be seen as good, if he is responsible for nature, or he might be seen as inept or of limited ability, something few religious believers can countenance. So secular and religious nature-worshippers alike may want to claim first for the goodness of nature, without yet making reference to God - religious nature-worshippers may not want to rely on claims for the goodness of nature which invoke a good God. God's character, if he exists, may be seen from his works, not the other way round.

The claims below about the goodness of nature may be made separately or together.

1. The natural world is "the best of all possible worlds". Compared to other possible worlds, it is therefore good.

2. Nature is good because its sublimity and majesty help make us wholly human. Without opportunity for the contemplation of nature we would be condemned to live one-dimensional, less than wholly human lives.

3. Nature is good because it "teaches" us certain moral qualities.

4. Nature is good at least partly because "natural evil" (to be explained, but including natural suffering) in particular is necessary, that we have the opportunity for moral growth.

5. Nature is good because it has produced us.

6. Nature is good because it contains variety, and variety is good.

I now deal with each of the above claims separately, to see whether each has any relevance for natural suffering relief.

1. "Nature is the best of all possible worlds"

If we take "nature" here to mean the whole of "God's Creation", i.e. the universe, this claim is the conclusion of the theodicy of Leibniz. (1) If it is reached just by trying, and failing, to imagine a better world than nature that could have been created, then at least this route to the conclusion refers to something, nature, though the characters of other "possible worlds" are left to the imagination. Leibniz's own route to the conclusion is, "an all-good God exists, therefore creates the best of all possible worlds". Just where do we look, without looking at nature, to establish whether an all-good God exists?

Suppose, though, we leave God out of this. What can we make of a statement that nature is the best of all possible worlds? It might make some sense to say that nature as created was the "best" of all possible worlds. For the atheist, either because it was the only possible world - no God to improve on it - or because other models were somehow available but inferior.

There is of course a considerable difficulty, not to say impossibility, with inspecting the credentials of other "possible worlds" to enable comparison with our own, at least at the time of "creation" or at some given prehistoric date. But anyway, surely the neo-Leibnizian "best possible world" claim doesn't address the question of whether nature is the best world now. Whether or not a God still has other possible worlds

available, someone else certainly has. That someone else is us. We are here now, we can change our world, we can change nature in some sense. We can (in theory) relieve some natural suffering, with tranquiliser dart guns for example. Some of us may already be "accidentally" relieving some natural suffering, for example where hunters' bullets give quicker and less painful deaths to animals than their starving to death or being eaten alive by natural predators. The question is, would a world in which net natural suffering relief had been achieved be a better world (other things equal) than nature as it is now? And why wouldn't it be a better world?

Preamble to "nature is good" claims 2 & 3

Holmes Rolston (2) identified seven senses in which we can and do, or can't and don't, "follow nature". The last four senses are all sub-divisions of the third sense. The first two senses are, rather trivially, first, we can't help but follow the laws of nature, second, in the opposite sense, every thing or action we make can't help but be artifactual rather than natural: the product of human rather than natural creation.

Four more senses of "follow nature" are "relative" for Rolston - by which he meant different human actions can be rated either as more or as less natural than one another, in the senses given. In the first "relative" sense, we can tend to respect, or alternatively risk upsetting, nature's equilibrium, with whatever consequences. In the second relative sense, we

could, perhaps like Nietzsche, glorify, or recommend human imitation of, nature's continual warring, for in nature, as Rolston observed, creatures are

> ... condemned to live by attacking other life. (3)

Rolston was here at pains to put some distance between himself and Nietzsche. In fact, rather tending to undermine his own eventual conclusion, Rolston said

> Nature proceeds with an absolute recklessness that is not only indifferent to life, but results in senseless cruelty which is repugnant to our moral sensibilities. Life is wrested from her creatures by continual struggle, usually soon lost; and those "lucky" few who survive to maturity only face more extended suffering and eventual collapse in disease and death. With what indifference nature casts forth to slaughter ... a hundred minnows, and a dozen rabbits, so that one of each might survive. Things are no sooner sprouted, hatched, or born than they are attacked; life is unrelieved stress, until sooner or later, swiftly or by inches, fickle nature crushes out the life she gave, and the misery is finally over. All we can be sure of from the hands of nature is ... a gory blood bath; she permits life only in agony. The world's last word is what the Buddhists call duhkha, suffering. (4)

But Rolston then introduced two senses in which he suggested we "follow nature". These form the bases of the next two claims on my list: nature is good because contemplation of its sublimity and majesty makes us wholly human, and nature is good because it "teaches" us moral qualities. Rolston said that these benefits actually join with nature's horrors as if both are parts of a musical symphony: the horrors form what he called the "minor key" section of the symphony!

2. "Nature is good because contemplation of it makes us wholly human"

Rolston suggested we follow our own human natures, which to be complete, he thought, are composed of at least three "dimensions". First, paradoxically, we are

> ... the animal for whom it is natural to be artificial ... (5)

so we need some scope to exercise the creative part of our nature, to build the artificial rather than rely entirely upon the natural. Second, however, we still need to harness nature to feed and nurture ourselves. Third, we need nature's sublimity and majesty, both that of gardened nature like domestic countryside, and, even more especially perhaps, wild nature like the High Sierra, though many of us will rarely set foot in this nature. Its very existence may suffice to inspire us. Rolston said that one facet alone of human nature makes us less than wholly human. For example,

> ... a purely urban person is a one-dimensional person; only those who add the rural and the wild are three-dimensional persons. As for myself, I consider life morally atrophied when respect for and appreciation of the naturally wild is absent. No one has learned the full scope of what it means to be moral until he has learned to respect the integrity and worth of those things we call wild. (6)

Neither I nor (I suspect) many sensitive people would deny that some form of access, whether physical or imaginative, to "wildness" is crucial to both our aesthetic and moral fulfilment, even to our sanity, in an increasingly structured, regulated, complicated world. For example, advocates of the remorseless advance of tarmac over English countryside, at the rate of a hundred more square miles covered every year (7) certainly seem both aesthetically and morally atrophied if they fail to recognise the sublimity and majesty of the landscape they are destroying.

The problem for Rolston, though, is that he just doesn't need to preserve <u>everything</u> that goes on in nature in order to preserve quite adequate access to "wildness". In fact I suspect most sensitive people would love to witness all <u>but</u> the last of the following "wild" scenes from their windows: a sunrise, thunder and lightning, a rainbow, waves crashing against a shore, the silhouettes of cliffs and mountains against a sunset, and - lions dragging a buffalo down to a violent and horrific death.

I fail to see how, if for example some endangered predator species are let die out, and any overpopulation of their prey animals is controlled via the tranquiliser dart gun, we lose the vast wildness of the waves of the sea, the majesty of the cliffs and mountains, the sublime tranquility of the sunset, the night sky, the awesome ancient silence of the deep countryside or wilderness. (8) Rolston simply doesn't need to take nature as a whole package. Why wouldn't nature be even better, if we could contemplate its undisputed glories and know that at least some of its horrors had disappeared?

3. "Nature is good because it "teaches" us certain moral qualities"

Rolston's final sense of "follow nature" is what he called the "tutorial" sense. For Rolston

> ... those who understand the "seasonal" character of life are the better able to rejoice in the turning of the seasons and to do everything well in its time ... Encounter with nature integrates me, protects me from pride, gives a sense of proportion and place, teaches me what to expect, and what to be content with, establishes other value than my own, and releases feelings in my spirit that I cherish and do not find elsewhere. (9)

His conclusion was that

> ... exposure to natural wildness is as necessary for a true education as the university. (10)

So from nature we may learn moral qualities such as awareness of interdependence, humility, patience, asceticism and unselfishness.

What response is due to the claim that nature is good because it teaches us certain moral qualities? We might be tempted to make a response that is similar to my response to the previous claim. We could say that we can take a dose of moral education from nature's bottle, just as we can take a dose of wildness, but we don't have to drink the whole bottle. Having taken a dose requisite for our needs, we can by natural suffering relief dilute the remaining contents to make them more palatable, as it were, for animals.

However, the above response is less satisfactory in the case of nature teaching us certain moral qualities. In performing or permitting natural suffering relief, we might be said to be displaying or tolerating the opposites of exactly the qualities implied by Rolston. We might be said, by our actions or omissions, to be repudiating the very education nature had just given us. Rolston might say that our involvement or complicity with natural suffering relief would constitute an example of losing our "sense of proportion or place" in relation to nature. It might not be "our place" to interfere with nature. We might start getting other ideas above our station too - taking it upon ourselves to reorganize nature generally,

where we are not doing so already: trying to play God, in fact. The general picture is that we commit sins of pride, give ourselves pride of place, and jettison self-discipline. In the context of natural suffering, therefore, we have to decide which is more important: suffering relief with "pride", or "following nature" with humility.

If we think suffering relief is more important than "following nature", do we though have to reject the moral qualities implied by Rolston? We don't. Awareness of interdependence we can demonstrate by trying to make sure that attempts at natural suffering relief aren't counter-productive. For example, suppose we don't let a predator species die out without trying to make sure we are able to painlessly cull any resultant overpopulation of prey animals. We can still be humble about our smallness and insignificance in relation to the universe, and be aware how fragile we are if our "pride" in other contexts, such as nuclear technology, gets out of control. It doesn't follow that if we are impatient about continued facilitation of natural suffering by conservationists, we are also impatient to dispense with nature's way of doing things in other contexts, eager to sanitize nature generally or exploit it ruthlessly for our own material gain. We simply have to be clear about which parts of nature we don't like, and be clear that suffering relief, not playing God, is our ideal.

In the end natural suffering relief may still get seen in some quarters as an example of humans taking too much upon themselves. Some suffering-relievers may indeed be dubiously motivated. But maybe here we can take

advantage of dubious motivation. We needn't let it spread to contexts where we can't take advantage of it. Just how well motivated, anyway, are those people who would indulge their own "education" from nature at the expense of continuing to allow what Rolston himself referred to as nature's

> ... senseless cruelty which is repugnant to our moral sensibilities? (11)

And so just how moral would these people be?

4. "Even natural evil is good, because it enables moral growth"

"Natural evil" means naturally occurring pain and suffering, in the theological literature. I have been using "natural suffering" to refer to any suffering that is not experienced or inflicted by humans, or, more succinctly, animal suffering in nature. However, the theological literature includes under "natural evil" certain "natural" misfortunes that happen to humans, for example diseases and earthquakes. Perhaps eventually we will be able to conquer diseases and anticipate and avoid earthquakes, even conquer natural animal suffering, but it seems that if much "natural evil" is conquered, then the theologians will not necessarily be pleased. For one of the more prominent theodicies has been based on the argument that natural evil is in a sense good - becauses it enables moral growth. Then, the argument goes, if even natural evil is good, nature must be good. (And for

theologians of course, this reflects well on the designer of nature, even demonstrates there is a designer of nature.)

So let's look at the claim that even natural evil is in a sense good, because it enables moral growth. (Note that because animals don't grow morally, any natural evils occuring to animals have to be good for human moral growth!) A version of the supporting argument appears below - it is the version put by Richard Swinburne.

> If men are to have knowledge of the evil which will result from their actions or negligence, laws of nature must operate regularly; and that means that there will be what I may call "victims of the system" ... if men are to have the opportunity to bring about serious evils for themselves or others by actions or negligence, or to prevent their occurrence, and if all knowledge of the future is obtained by normal induction, that is induction from patterns of similar events in the past - then there must be serious natural evils occuring to man or animals. (12)

John Hick, in similar vein, said that

> A world without problems, difficulties, perils and hardships would be morally static. For moral and spiritual growth comes through response to challenges; and in a paradise there would be no challenges. (13)

Three responses spring to mind. First, although we could admit that we do indeed learn things through attempting to meet challenges, we can point out that this feature of life doesn't normally make us regard the thing or person which presents the challenge as good - far from it. Hitler presented us with challenges. As D. Z. Phillips said in reply to the theodicy relevant here,

> What then are we to say of the child dying of cancer? ... If this has been done to anyone, it is bad enough, but to be done for a purpose, to be planned from eternity - that is the deepest evil. If God is this kind of agent, he cannot justify his actions, and his evil nature is revealed. (14)

So the fact that nature sets challenges won't make it, or its designer, good. Second, we can say that the whole point of a challenge is to meet it. Why can't we treat natural suffering as a challenge? After all, as Steve Sapontzis said,

> We routinely interfere with nature in order to protect ourselves (and animals, too) from such threats to (the quality of) life as flooding rivers, storms, avalanches, erosion, pestilence, diseases, birth defects, infections, and decay. (15)

We don't, normally, deliberately meet a challenge badly, with the idea that such incompetence will preserve the challenge to test future

generations - so they can also meet it badly to preserve it for their own offspring. We would be perverse to see challenges as good things, worth preserving in this way. In spite of what Hick says, in a way we aim at paradise - we try to get rid of challenges which bar our way to it, even if new challenges arise all the time, so any overall progress is difficult to discern. Of course, if we ever did eliminate suffering, we might then suffer from boredom, but this strange paradox doesn't seem to stop us always wanting to reduce avoidable suffering for the time being. We certainly wouldn't be content with the lot of some wild animal species in nature, barring human intervention - to be faced for endless generations with the normality of early, and violent or prolonged, deaths with no prospect whatever of social progress. The religious idea that eternal natural animal suffering has been arranged as part of a nature that enables human moral growth really is quite repugnant.

The third reply to Swinburne and Hick can be made along the lines of, "Well, what would be so bad about a paradise, then?" Though the present laws of nature may well have been necessary to give us the challenges we have faced, a paradise might also have its own, perhaps greater, merits! Brian Davies said

> ... it is true that there are virtues which could not be present in a paradise. There could not be courage, for example, for that presupposes danger ... But there seems no reason why people in paradise should not be able to love and do good ... There would be

> no struggle to deal with pain and suffering and to overcome it. But that would, surely, be a very good thing - better, indeed, than there being a world in which to be a person is to be involved in a need to struggle to deal with pain and suffering and to overcome them. A paradise would have no martyrs. But who wants martyrs? Even martyrs, presumably, do not ... (16)

When challenges are at a minimum, it doesn't mean they are non-existent. The challenge "to love and do good", as Davies puts it, would still exist. And unless and until there seems to be a danger of suffering from boredom that outweighs other suffering, it still seems we can improve the world by suffering relief, including perhaps natural suffering relief.

5. "Nature is good because it has produced us"

Natural suffering has accompanied the process of evolution, which has produced human beings. Our emergence from this process may be thought a good thing, making nature good. Would it be wise to interfere with the process of evolution, by natural suffering relief or whatever means?

But the above "nature is good" claim doesn't undermine the idea of natural suffering relief. First, it can be said that our being a good product of evolution, if this is true, needn't rule out our interfering with evolution outside its direct applicability to our further development.

Second, even if interference with evolution does, or may, prevent some positive developments, does the possibility of these developments always have to veto interference with evolution? Suppose even that some aliens had arrived on Earth before the evolution of humans, and these aliens had in fact inadvertently prevented the evolution of humans, by relieving some natural suffering that was around at the time. Why automatically assume that the aliens would have done better to leave things well alone?

6. "Nature is good because it contains variety, and variety is good"

There is something to be said for the idea that variety is better than sameness. It is certainly more interesting. The question, though, is just how far we prioritize variety in relation to other considerations.

Nature conservationists sometimes go to extraordinary lengths to preserve the full variety of animal species. This was demonstrated by a recent news item about an endangered species, the black rhinoceros. Black rhinos are falling victim to poachers in Zimbabwe at a rate which indicates that the species will soon be extinct, unless something is done to save it. To regenerate the species, nature conservationists in Zimbabwe have decided that some rhinos need to be relocated away from poachers, so they can reproduce in peace. The new location chosen is Australia! A small group of black rhinos has already been transported there by aircraft, with a long stopover (some months) for quarantine on an island in the Indian Ocean.

Unfortunately there were only two males in the group, one of which seemed rather sickly and which died in quarantine. The object of the exercise was then defeated in Australia when the remaining male, having been cooped up for so long, was released from his crate and couldn't cope with his sudden freedom - he went beserk, charged a perimeter fence and died of head injuries. Now the conservationists want to introduce the Zimbabwe female rhinos to male rhinos which live in Australian zoos.

Nature conservationists' concern with preserving the full variety of animal species leads them to take steps which involve very morally dubious treatment of animal individuals. Indeed, analogous treatment of human individuals would be regarded as morally outrageous. I heard recently that the last monolingual Cornish speaker had died. Suppose some lingual conservationists had wanted, a few decades ago, to preserve this breed. Would the conservationists have been morally justified in rounding up a group of Cornish speakers, transporting them to an island in the Atlantic away from the influence of English speakers, and encouraging them to reproduce among themselves until a sustainable Cornish speaking population could be re-introduced to Cornwall? Rather than put up with the violation of human rights that all this would involve, we would allow the variety of languages spoken in Britain to decrease in number. We simply wouldn't regard variety as that important. So there must at least be a question mark against variety's fitness to serve as a moral "trump", outplaying the considerations of rights or suffering of sentient beings. Variety isn't necessarily good, nor are contexts (e.g. nature) in which variety features.

The contrast between treatment of rare animals and "rare" humans is interesting. In some respects we don't seem to regard animals as beings at all. What is the best analogy for how we see wild animals? I agree with Eugene Hargrove's answer. He said

> ... the best analogy is a mass-produced toy ... The child's interest in the figure is primarily as an exemplification of the design, just as our natural (or cultural) interest in the individual animal is as an exemplification of the species ... the child may do things with the figure that eventually causes its head or arm to fall off ... Likewise, we are interested in using wildlife ... letting them be eaten by other animals, or letting them starve to death so as to preserve the natural character of the landscape. (17).

Conclusion

Neither the last mentioned, nor any of the previous "nature is good" claims establish that nature is sufficiently "good" to make the unnaturalness of natural suffering relief a major moral problem. Nature is in places sublime and majestic, but in other places suffering goes on that needn't continue in order for sublimity, majesty and wildness still to obtain. A world including careful natural suffering relief would be a better world, other things equal. We needn't throw out the baby of nature

with the bathwater of natural suffering. If the bathwater is in places scalding the baby, perhaps this is not to be regarded merely as a lesson for our future. Perhaps we might help out the baby now.

We are happy to watch natural history programmes about how the survival of the fittest produced us. But if a god asked us to fight amongst each other to evolve future beings who could in turn enjoy and value our sacrifice for producing them, would we be so happy? We wouldn't regard as "good" a nature in which we were the sacrificial objects, either for evolution, or for the stability of the existing ecosystem. So why regard as "good" a nature which sacrifices other creatures?

In some areas we see sense. Lions at Jersey Zoo are fed with the carcasses of domestic bullocks supplied by the local slaughterhouse. (18) The bullocks aren't slaughtered naturally, but do we seriously think it would be good to put the lions among the live bullocks, that they may help themselves to their food in the natural way?

Notes

1. Leibniz, Theodicee (1710). A theodicy (from theos, god, and dike, justice), is an attempt to reconcile the unlimited goodness of an all-powerful God with the reality of evil, or suffering, or both, in his universe.

2. Holmes Rolston, "Follow Nature?", Environmental Ethics, 1979, pp. 7-30.

3. Ibid., p. 17.

4. Ibid., p. 17.

5. Ibid., p. 20.

6. Ibid., p. 25.

7. Information from the Council for the Protection of Rural England.

8. With acknowledgements to Sir John Betjeman, who spoke of the "ancient silence" of the Cornish countryside and remarked how, so often, crass modern man is "scared of it". Betjeman hated violence; I would be interested to know whether he would have agreed with me about natural suffering.

9. Rolston, op. cit., pp. 25-6.

10. Ibid., p. 27.

11. Ibid., p. 17.

12. Richard Swinburne, The Existence of God (Oxford, 1991), p. 210.

13. John Hick, Evil and the God of Love (London, 1977), p. 372.

14. D. Z. Phillips, The Concept of Prayer (London, 1965), p. 93.

15. Steve Sapontzis, Morals, Reasons and Animals (Temple, 1987), p. 237.

16. Brian Davies, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (Oxford, 1993), p. 39. I am grateful to Davies for his clear and orderly exposition of the arguments in the theodicy relevant here, although I think his conclusion is lame - it is that even suffering-inflictors (God, surgeons before anaesthetics were used, etc) can be good: we can't prove God's badness.

17. Eugene Hargrove, "Foundations of Wildlife Protection Attitudes", Inquiry, 1987, p. 24.

18. So I am reliably informed by Jo Wolff, University College London.

Part 2, Section 2

A THING AGAINST THE SYSTEM

I have tried to show that claims for the goodness of nature don't form a basis for rejecting natural suffering relief. Nature is just not good in the required sense, though it may be good for some things. So let's put the question again. Why wouldn't it be a good thing to try to relieve at least some natural suffering? Another fairly predictable answer would be "because that would be to risk harm to the ecosystem". According to this answer, natural suffering relief wouldn't be a good thing, by reason of it being a "thing against the system". But then it has to follow that the ecosystem is good for something. What is it good for? What is needed from the ecosystem? Whatever the thing in question is, is the ecosystem the best means of its delivery? If not, perhaps the system needs adjusting. Mightn't natural suffering relief actually be a means of adjustment?

So, what is the ecosystem for? First, what system, precisely, are we talking about? In the last section we encountered claims that nature is or was good: good for our aesthetic and moral education, good for bringing about the very evolution of humans, etc. Was is the interesting word here. The nature that evolved us is not the same nature we now inhabit. Once it was a non-human ecosystem. Now it's a partly human one: we are part of it. If once nature was "for" our evolution, this can no longer be. Nature will have to be "for" something else. Which purpose, which system, is wanted?

So human beings have evolved. But this needn't stop us retaining an anthropocentric perspective, for the moment. We could continue with an anthropocentric perspective by regarding the present ecosystem as serving the primary purpose of providing a congenial environment in which we humans can prosper. But then it is difficult to see how this purpose would be served optimally by a "don't tamper with natural suffering" recommendation. If it is thought that the point in favour of evolution is that it has produced us, well, we are here now. So preserving evolutionary processes, by non-interference with natural predation, starvation, etc, is no longer necessary. We could perhaps experiment with nature in attempts to further our own prosperity. We could do some more livestock farming, and to facilitate this we could cull some more wolves, in areas where they still exist. If we treated our livestock well, possibly we would cause a net decrease in natural suffering, and we would further our own prosperity. Why, then, should we retain the maxim "don't tamper with natural suffering"? The maxim gets in the way.

There is another major problem for opponents of natural suffering relief if they orient mainly towards human welfare. In the last paragraph I constructed an example in which wolves were a threat to further human prosperity. They might deprive us of "our" sheep. Perhaps though it could be argued that we only need more sheep for further prosperity - not to keep us from starving. What if some wild predators are in direct competition with humans for prey animal food - for survival, in fact?

If we value human over animal life, and we have the motivation to kill both the predators in direct competition with us, and the prey we are competing for, why don't we just allow our population to rise at the expense of animal populations until the point where we might fall foul of the law of diminishing returns? We could finish off animal populations altogether if turning their habitat over to arable farming was more cost-effective than continuing in our carnivorous habits.

If human welfare is the primary purpose, there is great difficulty with ruling out tampering with nature - and so, with natural suffering - in cases where humans might be highly motivated, through commercial gain or survival, to tamper with nature. There might be cases where we are so highly motivated that we gain by, or need to create, a whole new ecological balance to replace the present one. The new balance would be, in effect, a new ecosystem. If human welfare is the primary purpose, this new ecosystem should be preferable to the present one. But the maxim "don't tamper with natural suffering" couldn't possibly be held to, at least not until it could be deployed in defence of an ecosystem that constituted some set of consequences regarded as optimal. Unless, possibly, we are pessimistic, cautious and conservative to a quite extraordinary degree, and tend to regard all grandiose human projects as ultimately counter-productive, a point to which I will return. In the meantime, let's consider a view held by an opponent of natural suffering relief who isn't primarily human-oriented.

Stephen Clark (1) thought that, for example, we have no good reason to take a squirrel's nuts, any more than white men had good reason to take the crops and labour of non-white people. Now hypothesize to a situation rather like the one I presented earlier, in which, this time, humans are competing with squirrels for nuts as a matter of survival. Suppose too we are talking about the relatively rare red squirrel, as opposed to the grey squirrel which is often prone to overpopulation. So the contrived, but instructive, extremity of the situation would probably have been brought about by gross human overpopulation. It would seem that, for Clark, "surplus" humans, being members of the species that had grown "too" big, would still have no good reason to take food that the squirrels would be wanting to eat. For Clark, no good reason "any more than" white men who are "surplus" would have good reason to take non-whites' food, if we were to replace "humans" in the example with "white men", and "squirrels" in the example with "non-whites". Opponents of natural suffering relief like Clark don't orient themselves to a particular species, but tend to orient themselves away from species with runaway population levels. So "surplus" or potential new members of species with runaway population levels will tend to have their individual interests disregarded. If these surplus members are non-human animals and already living, such as grey squirrels, a periodic cull may be favoured, to cope with the overpopulation. The matter of "surplus" humans is different in practice, since few people favour a cull or neglect of surplus humans. However, some people favour the disregarding of individual interests of potential new humans - they tend to favour readily available abortion especially in places where human overpopulation is most acute.

The idea that "nature's balance" is best not tampered with lies behind the view that there is something bad about a species with a runaway population level. Nature left to its own devices is seen as a self-regulating mechanism, and though parts of the mechanism (e.g. predation) are painful for living creatures, preservation of the whole mechanism intact is seen as too important for us to be risking an attempt at smoothing the operation of some of its parts (e.g. by natural suffering relief). Runaway overpopulation is seen rather as an overwound mainspring would be seen by a watchmaker - in danger of breaking the mechanism.

Instead of runaway overpopulation of one species over another species, "species-blind" (as opposed to human-oriented) opponents of natural suffering relief prefer what Clark called a "settled relationship" (2) between population levels of species. However, both concepts "runaway" and "settled" are problematic. "Runaway" from what level, and at what rate? "Settled" at what level, and over what timespan? Suppose we take a period "just" before early human civilization evolved, and say for the sake of argument that, over this period, population levels between other species were "settled". Then humans begin to cross the seas, colonize new land masses and do some hunting of other species not hunted before by humans. Do these developments constitute "runaway" human overpopulation and an "unsettling" of the natural ecosystem? Even if the sizes of the new human colonies then remain stable over several centuries, and their hunting doesn't much affect the population level of prey animals? (Perhaps because humans have simply replaced the previous top predator?)

As I argued near the beginning of this section, "nature" changes, and as there was once a non-human ecosystem, there is now a partly human ecosystem. Allowing "no tampering" with the pre-civilization ecosystem, all those centuries ago, would have prevented all human development since, including the development of morality itself! So perhaps the moral maxim "don't tamper with nature" has to be somewhat time-dependent. But if we then try to agree on a time (and therefore agree on a particular "balance", a particular ecosystem) what are our criteria for selection? A time when the number of humans was tiny? Or (perhaps because that time featured insufficient moral development, included slavery, etc) a later time, by when there were a few more of us around, and we had developed at least some moral habits? At what time (perhaps it has passed already) will there be "too many" humans, or at what level and at what rate of increase will our population be excessive? Our population growth has had a tendency to send other species to their extinction. If species-blind opponents of natural suffering relief count this tendency against us, what are the criteria for preferring, say, rare black rhinos to "surplus" humans? What would an ecosystem reintroducing black rhinos be <u>for</u>? Why are black rhinos desirable? Would it be a good thing to reintroduce Tyrannosaurus Rex, if we found some of its eggs in frozen animation in Siberia?

Faced with my barrage of questions as to precisely which time, which set of consequences they prefer and why, species-blind opponents of natural suffering relief may now be exasperated. They may say "Well, let's just try our moral maxim <u>now</u>."

Any previous human tampering with natural suffering is now a fait accompli. From now on, is there any crucial sense in which things are likely to get worse if we tamper with natural suffering? What further arguments, if any, can be mustered against natural suffering relief?

As we have seen, species-blind opponents of natural suffering relief face difficult questions in trying to justify one species ratio over another. Good or bad consequences for whom, exactly, and why? We are drawn into questions about the relative values of different types of lives. But instead they could try tackling a suffering relief ethic on its own territory. They could try to argue that attempts at natural suffering relief would be prohibitively dangerous in that they might lead to greater suffering than exists already. If this argument succeeds, then the natural ecosystem in its present state could be seen as being "for", or at least tending to work towards, minimum suffering.

The argument might start thus. In areas of nature where there has been little human encroachment, animal species ratios have tended to change a good deal less than in areas where humans have encroached. As a result of human encroachment more species extinctions, area extinctions, or at least depletions have occured, and all of these things will tend to have knock-on effects on species which used to feed on, or be population controlled by, depleted species.

Knock-on effects may include the following. A great deal of suffering may occur, in the form of widespread starvation. Predators of depleted prey species may starve, and prey of depleted predator species may overpopulate, exhaust their food supply, then starve. Humans may eventually starve if they are potentially in competition for a food supply which is more prone to exhaustion. Attempts at relief of present natural suffering might similarly cause increased starvation, particularly if they take the form of somehow isolating animals from the cause of their otherwise impending suffering. Such isolation might help some animals now, but not necessarily later, and "no animal is an island" - removal from predator or prey might affect <u>that</u> animal too, or its species - very badly.

An initial response could point out that natural suffering relief could instead take the form of something more ecologically "sound" - such as simply replacing natural population control (predation, starvation, etc) by an artificial but less painful method, via the tranquiliser dart gun. Just doing the same job, to the same ends, but by improved means. Also, it could be pointed out that even ecologically "unsound" natural suffering relief could avoid increased suffering in the long term, if this suffering relief was so patchy, or carried out at such a trickle of a rate, that expectations of worse repercussions would be unrealistic. Even this patchy suffering relief would be better than nothing - it would, after all, relieve some suffering. Can even this small consequence be "trumped" by some factor that might need to outweigh it?

Three objections might be made even to natural suffering relief that is ecologically "sound", or natural suffering relief that is so small-scale it is unlikely to have worse ecological repercussions. One objection might run along similar lines to what Peter Singer has said:

> ... Judging by our past record, any attempt to change ecological systems ... is going to do far more harm than good. (3)

A second objection would ignore past empirical indicators to our possible suffering relief performance. It would say simply that in principle human performance is fallible. Even in doing something supposedly limited or contained we might in fact be doing more harm than we realise. A third objection might say that even if the initial results of natural suffering relief are favourable, in a sense a bad example will have been set. Successful practitioners of natural suffering relief may create the impression that there are no problems attached to the activity, from whence potentially less successful practitioners might be encouraged to try their luck. Or "too many cooks might spoil the broth" - what at first may seem a small band of suffering-relievers might grow to a vast army of humans stomping over nature in their hobnail boots.

Opponents of natural suffering relief needn't be committed to anything like the view that nature is good, or near-suffering-free. Indeed, nature may represent for them only a barely acceptable outcome; a very low stake. Other, suffering-reduced permutations may look like better outcomes.

However, the quest for them is seen as too risky. Similar caution can obtain in other contexts. Take, for example, the idea in international relations that it is wise to punish aggressors. It may often be the case that "punishing an aggressor" might bring about appalling suffering. Punishing Argentina for invading the Falklands involved death, maiming or bereavement for hundreds of people. But allowing a world in which aggressors might thrive is widely considered too risky. So the one vital consequence here is the preservation of the rule of some sense of "international law". Again it may represent a minimum outcome - arguably, better outcomes might have obtained. We could have accepted the loss of the Falklands, financially compensating or requesting evacuation of the islanders to save lives and suffering. The way to stop future aggressors might simply have been to deter them with troops on the ground where threats existed - e.g. by keeping adequate forces in Belize to deter the Guatemalans. Failure to do something similar in the Falklands arguably precipitated the Argentine invasion.

Opponents of natural suffering relief needn't confine themselves to the use of negative maxims like "don't tamper with natural suffering", "don't upset the ecosystem", etc. There may be some "do's" as well. Though past tampering with natural suffering is a fait accompli, opponents of natural suffering relief may favour some nature-tampering of their own, designed to rectify the effects of past tampering which they regard as negative. Sometimes, for example, predators are reintroduced into areas where they have been made extinct. The British Wolf Society thinks wolves would be

good for controlling deer in the Scottish Highlands, and thinks wolf reintroduction there is well worth investigating. (4)

Reintroductions of species are a particularly interesting case for discussion. With threatened extinctions we are always debating about hypothetical developments. Where reintroductions are proposed we can and are motivated to look properly at actual situations and requirements - for example, the law courts may have to decide whether wolf reintroduction is legal in the Yellowstone National Park, so reintroducers will be motivated to make out a very thorough case. (5) If reintroducers claim that a vital ecological function would be served by reintroduction, then opponents of reintroduction see its prevention as important too. Their incomes might be affected, for example if they are farmers. Even wolf reintroducers admit that one wolf can kill well over a hundred farm animals per year in dense populations of livestock. (6)

What we see here actually is that the reintroduction case can't be anywhere near as well-established as its makers would like it to be - if it was well-established, then executive powers would be under pressure to take action as a matter of some urgency. Even in Scotland where it is claimed wolves would be good for controlling deer, presumably someone has been doing this job since the wolf disappeared, many years ago! If marksmen have been doing it, deer can regard this method as better than the wolf's!

The fact that reintroductions are hotly contested and controversial, rather than obvious matters of urgency, leads us to be suspicious of claims that currently disappearing species might be irreplaceable. But irreplaceable in what sense? Even if an ecosystem could function after a species extinction, suffering could increase with the advent of the extinction in question - because, according to the argument we are considering, the ecosystem before our interference has been "programmed", we might say, so as to minimise suffering. In engineering and allowing extinctions, humans would be mucking up the "suffering-minimisation" programme. Or just <u>might</u> be mucking up the programme - remember, slight risk is bad enough, for the argument now under consideration. We might not need to look far in the future for evidence of negative effect. We might, for example, make a commonsense guess that a prey animal "deprived" of its predator would instead probably die of starvation simply because, without the predator's cull, it would probably grow old, feeble, and unable to forage for food. No wild animals spend their old age in care homes with food provided, even if they are "lucky" enough to live to their old age! So predation may in some cases constitute suffering relief from starvation - at least death from predation tends to be quicker than death from starvation. There is the issue of how much the increased span of the prey animal's life counts for. But it will be seen that letting predators die out is not a simple recipe for suffering relief. (A predator may also be <u>another</u> predator's prey - so more starvation, etc, etc.) But just how far can the line be held against neglect of, or tampering with, nature?

There springs to mind straight away at least one context in which to look for examples of nature-meddling where net suffering relief has taken place. Though far from all livestock farming is humane, there must surely be very many cases of thoughtful and responsible farmers giving their animals a life more long and peaceful than it would have been for the animals' ancestors. Slaughter too, when it comes, can accord with humane standards - there has for a while now been a Humane Slaughter Association in Britain, which we can presume has had some adherents and even made some converts among farmers. Now, if grazing farm animals are in some parts of the globe still subject to the attentions of natural predators, can a suffering relief ethic justify "rescuing" these predators if they are "endangered"? Some prey populations may already be under humane human control, if they are cattle or sheep for example. It then depends whether other wild animals may be affected by predator loss, and how. But there is no reason to be dogmatically opposed to, say, predator loss. This extreme conservatism is hard to justify.

Extreme conservatism is manifested by objections even to ecologically "sound", or very limited, natural suffering relief. These objections, put simply, are that we have a poor record of intervention in nature so far, we are in principle fallible, and even "good" interventions might encourage bad ones. Simple replies to these objections are available. The first doctors had a poor record of intervention in disease, but routine bloodletting has long since been superseded by more successful medical techniques. Yes we are still fallible, but we don't let this stop us daily

at least slightly risking that which is most important to us - we cross busy roads full of fallible drivers, thereby slightly risking our lives. Finally, yes, mass botched participation in natural suffering relief would ruin a good cause, much as mass tourism ruins the case for access to areas of natural beauty. But we could attempt legislation to prevent such ruination, if it threatened. We licence gun owners now. We could licence tranquiliser dart gun owners.

Another point concerns the idea that the existing ecosystem is like a "suffering-minimisation" programme where natural suffering is concerned. Actually, what is being "minimised" here is not possible suffering - remember, "suffering-reduced" permutations have been rejected as too risky. What is being "minimised", if anything, is the suffering regarded as affordable. But since it has been decided that no attempt at improvement on the status quo is affordable, what we have here is quite extraordinary defeatism.

We can look to at least three philosophers to provide us with very strong reasons to reject such defeatism. First, Singer, who tends to supply ammunition for both sides in our debate. Here, we can transfer to a natural suffering context something he said on the issue of private, as opposed to government, aid to poor countries:

> ... unless there is a definite probability that by refusing to give we would be helping to bring about an increase in government

> assistance, refusing to give privately is ... refusal to prevent a definite evil for the sake of a very uncertain gain. (7)

Unless there is a probability that leaving nature alone minimises suffering, refusing to relieve natural suffering is bad. It is a refusal to prevent a definite evil for the sake of a very uncertain gain - that the status quo might represent a "gain" from a hypothetical botched suffering relief operation. Suffering relief now may need to be followed by later adjustment to the ecosystem. But there may be cases in which we are highly motivated to make adjustment, including cases of commercial viability. (8)

Steve Sapontzis gave us two more reasons to reject ecological "holism", by which is meant the view that favours keeping the whole ecosystem intact. First, he invited us to compare holism to something very murky in the past:

> We have already seen what happens when the individual is considered to be nothing more than material at the disposal of a Volk or Party; there is no reason to believe that the results would be any more acceptable if the value of individuals was totally at the disposal of ... balances preferred by ecologists ... (9)

The negative value of an individual animal's suffering is, for the holist, disposable, if, by such suffering, balances preferred by ecologists are achieved. Sapontzis also objected to valuing individuals according to their function in the ecosystem, because functional values, he said,

... are not intrinsically tied to making the world a better place. (10)

As we have seen, holism is an extraordinarily conservative philosophy.

Finally, I turn to Eugene Hargrove. Hargrove referred us to a holistic philosophy put forward by Barry Commoner that

... any major man-made change in a natural system is likely to be detrimental to that system. (11)

Hargrove called this philosophy "Therapeutic Nihilism", a term frequently used by the Viennese medical community in the nineteenth century. In medicine Therapeutic Nihilism encouraged neglect of patients and indifference to human life. Its purpose was to enable analysis and diagnosis of illness rather than concentrate on early treatment. Since even painkillers were apt to distort symptoms, use of painkillers had been virtually abandoned in the Vienna General Hospital by 1850. The medical profession's view of treatment as being likely to be counter-productive was fuelled by the childbed fever problem in the 1840s. The infant mortality rate was inversely proportional to the degree of medical attention given.

In fact the childbed fever problem was caused by doctors not disinfecting their hands after dissecting cadavers, though this explanation was not accepted until many years later. The principle of Therapeutic Nihilism generally tends to benefit future patients at the expense of

current ones. It can lead to greater "efficiency" in the long term, but ethically is of course highly questionable.

Commoner defended "Therapeutic Nihilism" in environmental contexts by likening man-made change in nature to random thrusts into the works of a wristwatch, and saying that in both cases continued functioning of the system is endangered. Hargrove criticised Commoner by saying that unlike a watch nature is unlikely to break down - instead it will change, e.g. coyotes will replace wolves, and there will be benefits for some and costs for others. Also, we don't have to make random thrusts into the watch - skilled pokes by a watch repairer will be less dangerous and might achieve an improvement. Environmental Therapeutic Nihilism, for Hargrove,

> ... has contributed to a peculiar kind of callousness toward wild animals. Just as the seeming inability to help patients in the nineteenth century hardened most doctors and encouraged neglect and indifference to human life and suffering, our seeming inability to manipulate ecosystems beneficially appears to have fostered a similar indifference to the suffering of animal life in natural settings. The perpetuation of such an attitude ... runs counter to our basic moral sentiments ... (12)

The new point that emerges here is that, unlike the wristwatch, the ecosystem may not be a system, in a very important sense. Unlike the watch, the ecosystem doesn't simply repeat itself, though of course it has many

repetitious characteristics: tides, seasons, bird migrations, animal hibernations etc. Despite these repetitious characteristics, though, nature isn't always going round in circles, like the hands of a watch. It doesn't, or at least it doesn't so obviously, operate according to a plan. It's not even like a guided missile, going somewhere definite. It's more like a mysterious river, meandering round obstacles to end up we know not quite where. Possibly one day we might get a clearer idea. But we may never do so. Why then assume that this apparently aimless and amoral beast, nature, in fact knows best about what level of suffering is affordable, or about any other moral issue? Why give nature a blank cheque for suffering infliction?

Notes

1. Stephen Clark, "Rights of the Wild and Tame", Proceedings of the British Association of Nature Conservationists, 1984.

2. Stephen Clark, "The Rights of Wild Things", Inquiry, 1979, p. 186.

3. Peter Singer, Animal Liberation (Jonathan Cape, 1976), p. 252.

4. "Wolves at the Door", The Guardian, 5 August 1994.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Peter Singer, Practical Ethics (Cambridge, 1985), p. 179.

8. See Eric Rakowski, Equal Justice (Clarendon, 1991), p. 365.

9. Steve Sapontzis, "Holism - Revolution or Reminder?", Topoi, March 1993, p. 34.

10. Ibid., p. 37.

11. Barry Commoner, The Closing Circle: Nature, Man and Technology (Knopf, 1971), p. 41. Quoted by Eugene Hargrove, Foundations of Environmental Ethics (Prentice-Hall, 1989), p. 148.

12. Hargrove, op. cit., p. 154.

Part 2, Section 3

THE THING TO DO IN UTOPIA?

So far, the objections to natural suffering relief that have been encountered have been found wanting. But a stronger objection can be anticipated. It would say simply that natural suffering relief time and energy would be better spent trying to relieve suffering in the human realm. Even a utilitarian observer with a sort of God's eye view, impartial between species, would be hard put to deny top priority to human realm suffering relief, simply for the reason that it would be a better investment of resources. We can help humans help themselves to avoid future suffering. We can't do this with animals. But then it would seem, in principle, that one day we might have helped ourselves to avoid human realm suffering to such an extent that we have plenty of time and energy left over for natural suffering relief. (1) Both to simplify matters, and to cover even the furthest eventuality, let's assume we have even reached Utopia in the human realm. So no human realm suffering relief now competes with natural suffering relief. I put a new question. Why wouldn't it be a good thing to try to relieve as much natural suffering as possible? Why wouldn't natural suffering relief be the thing to do in Utopia? After some necessary preliminary comment, this section investigates several answers that might be made to my new question.

In Part 1, we saw that Roslind Godlovitch (2) raised a supposed absurdity connected with natural suffering relief by death. She said that if we are interested in the suffering but not the lives of animals in general, extermination of all animal life is indicated, for all animals suffer at one time or another. In the human realm, negative utilitarianism certainly invites immediate ridicule, because although we negatively value human suffering, we also positively value human lives. But let's, at least momentarily, suspend our ridicule for negative utilitarianism as applied to nature. After all, it might appear that, unlike humans, animals live only in order to live. It might appear that there is no intrinsic point to their lives. What then would be the point of continuously relieving natural suffering? Why not just have a one-off mass painless killing of all animals?

Animals do live in order to live, that is, they are programmed to be always on the look-out for food, shelter, protection, camouflage and opportunities for reproduction. Even in an environment where they had little time in which they could safely drop their guard and relax, animals wouldn't see their lives as unsatisfactory in quite the way humans might, if basic needs were met but there seemed nothing to live for for its own sake. So in an important sense animals aren't bothered about not having anything to live for, apart from life itself. They don't "set out" to live for other things, as it were. But they might discover them, if their environment relents for a moment. For example, animals which have fed, caught up on their sleep, and which don't face immediate threats, tend to

discover the pleasures of play, or perhaps grooming each other. Given future opportunities, they will repeat these things, and these things will be done for their own sakes, not in order to live. For animals, discovered pleasures are intrinsically worthwhile. So, prima facie, it appears that in Utopia it would be a worthwhile thing to relieve natural suffering without at the same time prematurely ending natural lives. So let's, for the sake of argument, suggest the task in hand for any would-be natural suffering relievers. It is to anaesthetise animals' otherwise impending painful "natural" deaths by predation, starvation or disease. There springs to mind the rather comic image of armies of humans with tranquiliser dart guns, in jeeps, chasing round, Keystone Cops style, trying to tranquilise gazelles, etc, just before the cheetahs get them. But my question isn't, wouldn't this be comic? My question is, wouldn't this be moral? Why wouldn't it be moral? And the more of it happening, the more moral?

So, in Utopia, why wouldn't it be a good thing to try to relieve as much natural suffering as possible? Below I suggest some answers:

1. "Because the suffering relief workload would be unreasonably demanding."

2. "Because the workload would be too demanding to be workable."

3. "Because, irrespective of whether they could cope with the workload, humans might not be left enough time for intrinsically worthwhile pursuits."

Of course, discussions about the demandingness of suffering relief needn't be, and haven't been, confined to, or indeed at all about, the context of natural suffering relief. Discussions on the issue of human positive goods versus suffering relief needn't be, and haven't been, confined to, or indeed at all about, the context of natural suffering relief. But here, obviously, the discussions are confined to the context of natural suffering relief.

1. "Optimal natural suffering relief would be unreasonably demanding."

Before we go any further, two relevant factors need to be investigated. First, the size of the natural suffering relief workload. Second, the size of the suffering relief workforce. About the first factor, probably we can only speculate and hypothesize. Millions of small birds, rodents, etc, let alone the more visible animal species, will still be suffering, unless they become extinct before we get to Utopia. It is very doubtful whether the human race could, even "on paper", cover the amount of suffering relief involved. So, in the absence of any firm projections, let's list the possible scenarios:

1. The amount of suffering relief can't be covered, even "on paper". Suppose it's not even possible for us to breed new suffering relievers, because the environment won't sustain them!

2. The amount of suffering relief can just be covered, but only with universal human participation in natural suffering relief. Again, suppose the environment won't sustain the breeding of new suffering relievers, so we can't lighten the workload.

3. The amount of suffering relief can be more than covered. With universal human participation in natural suffering relief, everyone would be left with a significant amount of time and energy left over. Perhaps species extinctions have after all taken their toll.

Next, we need to consider the relative size of the participating suffering relief workforce. We could make enough exact projections here to make my discussion interminable. But perhaps it will emerge that only the difference between two particular projections, the second one vague, is philosophically interesting:

i. In a scenario comparable to (3) above, everyone does participate in natural suffering relief.

ii. In a scenario comparable to (3) above, enough people absent themselves from natural suffering relief to ensure that other people have a workload big enough to keep them at full stretch.

So, back to the point at issue. Under scenario (3), on projection (i), natural suffering relief would leave everyone with a significant amount of

spare time and energy. In this situation, people would be least inclined to disagree that it would be a good thing to try to relieve as much natural suffering as possible. But under scenarios (1) and (2), and scenario (3) on projection (ii), doing as much natural suffering relief as possible would mean that people would have a suffering relief workload big enough to keep them at full stretch. (3) In this situation, people would be much more inclined to say "optimal natural suffering relief would be too demanding to be reasonable". Would this be fair comment?

The complaint here is not that optimal natural suffering relief would prevent people from doing something else worthwhile. Even if people wanted time left over just to twiddle their thumbs, the complaint would stand. People would say, simply, "optimal natural suffering relief would be too demanding to be reasonable". And if optimal natural suffering relief threatened to put people at full stretch, the above statement would meet with wide, perhaps near universal, agreement. The extent of this agreement would, for some, in itself justify use of the term "unreasonable" to describe optimal natural suffering relief. If a thing is so much out of tune with our near universal inclinations or intuitions, this in itself would be held sufficient a reason to fail the thing in question under the "reasonability" test. Optimal natural suffering relief would be held to be too demanding to pass the test. But we might be well advised to dwell a little on the seemingly straightforward question of whom optimal natural suffering relief might be too demanding <u>for</u>.

Obviously, optimal natural suffering relief would be held to be too demanding for us. But whom does this leave out? Of course, the animals. Since they would be the intended beneficiaries of optimal natural suffering relief, it would be absurd to say it would be too demanding for them. But suppose, then, that we desist from optimal natural suffering relief on the grounds that it would be too demanding for us. What then happens to the animals? Of course, the less natural suffering relief we do, the more they have to run the gauntlet of natural suffering. We're happy - the situation isn't demanding for us. But why not look at it this way - mightn't our falling short from an optimal natural suffering relief effort be more demanding for animals than an optimal effort would be demanding for humans?

If we made an optimal natural suffering relief effort (at least, under conditions of the relevant scenarios earlier described) we would be in danger of suffering from things like physical exhaustion, mental frustration and lack of fulfilment, perhaps severe injury if something went wrong, perhaps suicidal thoughts if we were sufficiently frustrated but felt unable to "conscientiously object". But if we fell short from an optimal natural suffering relief effort? The further we fell short, the more animals would suffer from things like being eaten alive, starving to death, dying slowly and painfully from untreated disease, etc. The worst that might result from the things on the humans' list would probably be suicide. But at least that could be quick, if it happened. We wouldn't seriously want for ourselves any of the things on the animals' list. So the worst demandingness would lie elsewhere from where we think.

Suppose two alien species arrive to colonise Earth, both species at least as far ahead of us technologically as we are far ahead of animals. Further, the first alien species is as far ahead of the second as the second is far ahead of us. The second species has a nasty habit of eating humans alive, and we have difficulty resisting this. But we can see that the first alien species has the technology, and at least some inclination, at least to tranquilise us before we get eaten alive. But we hear one member of the first species saying to the other members, "don't tranquilise more than a certain amount of humans - to tranquilise more of them would be too demanding". We would want to object that not to tranquilise more of us would be more demanding for us than to tranquilise more of us would be demanding for the first alien species. We wouldn't want the first alien species to hide behind the sham objectivity of "too demandingness" here. But this sham objectivity extends too to the claim "optimal natural suffering relief would be too demanding to be reasonable". We would be on surer ground if we confined ourselves to the claim "optimal natural suffering relief would be too demanding to be workable". (4)

2. "Optimal natural suffering relief would be too demanding to be workable"

Here, once again, an exception may be made under conditions of my earlier scenario (3), on projection (i), where the natural suffering relief workload would be small enough, and the participating suffering relief workforce huge enough, to render optimal natural suffering relief workable.

However, in the cases where optimal natural suffering relief would threaten to put people at full stretch, people would be inclined to say that it would be too demanding to be workable. In other words, that people just wouldn't put up with the heaviness of the workload, or perhaps, anything like this heaviness.

It may be said that the question at issue is not whether optimal natural suffering relief would work, but whether it would be a good thing if it did work, or perhaps, whether it would be a good thing to try to make it work. And so far, we haven't encountered an objection to natural suffering relief, even to optimal natural suffering relief (in Utopia), which hasn't been found wanting, or which hasn't applied only contingently. So it might appear that at least to <u>attempt</u> optimal natural suffering relief, at least in Utopia where the contingencies are favourable, would be a good thing. How could such an attempt not be a good thing?

There are two answers, perhaps. First, an attempt at optimal natural suffering relief wouldn't be a good thing if the unworkability of the attempt threatened to become so acute as to make the attempt self-defeating. Imagine, for example, that suffering relievers might feel like moral conscripts, and, like Russian conscripts in Chechenia, their unwillingness might cause them to be so incompetent that their masters would wish they'd never been sent in.

Second, acceptance that optimal natural suffering relief is a good thing might eventually turn so sour as to undermine the idea even of sub-optimal human realm suffering relief, were this suffering relief ever to be needed again. Eventually, people might come to see the demandingness of optimal natural suffering relief as a kind of hell. (5) Some of them might have been born in this hell, but they might see that the descent to hell from outside is the slippery slope of suffering relief. They might resolve not only to escape hell, but, once out, to avoid the slippery slope of suffering relief, rather than ever in future set foot on it.

Even in my earlier scenario where optimal natural suffering relief would leave people with spare time and energy, people might feel that future human realm suffering relief would immediately take them to full stretch. And with this feeling might come unease, leading to disillusionment with the whole idea of suffering relief. And so perhaps, eventually, there would be mass desertions from the armies of suffering relievers. Again, somewhere down the line, future suffering relief efforts might be made unworkable; undermined by previous efforts having been so ambitious as to provoke desertions from the poor bloody infantry, and a resolve on the part of their offspring never in future to join the suffering relief armies. So the suffering relief generals have a dilemma. Would it be better not to expect so much from the infantry? Would it be better <u>not</u> to try to optimise?

Any good general has to take into account considerations of the motivation of his troops, and how to get the best out of them. One fairly obvious way that has been tried, in several contexts, has been to treat the "troops" equally, at least because we are all so prone to look at what the next person is being expected to do, and to resent being expected to do much more than what the next person is being expected to do. So, up until a certain point, we may be prepared to take on a demanding workload, suffering relief or otherwise, if everyone else is being expected to take on a similar workload. But only up until a certain point. If our individual workloads threaten to take us to full stretch, we may not be so easily consoled by knowledge that similar levels of performance are being expected of other people. (6) So let's suppose that in our case the optimal natural suffering relief workload is too big for its equal subdivision to allow people not to be at full stretch. Here, would sub-optimal suffering relief be more workable than optimal suffering relief, because less demanding? In the long term, would sub-optimal suffering relief be <u>sufficiently</u> more workable as to end up leading to greater relief of suffering?

It may well be that we can do little more than speculate. But we can keep in mind a couple of cautionary principles. First, that, as soon as we think we might be able to afford to keep people at less than full stretch, it will then almost certainly be counter-productive to treat them unequally by expecting some but not all of them to go to full stretch. Unless exhaustion threatens, people do tend to work better if they are treated equally.

But, second, even if we think optimal suffering relief might be too demanding to be workable, or at any rate to be sufficiently workable for our purposes, we would be well advised to wonder whether refusal to embark upon it might be, in Peter Singer's words,

> ... refusal to prevent a definite evil for the sake of a very uncertain gain. (7)

It might be very uncertain that sub-optimal suffering relief would prove more workable, because less demanding, in the long term. It might be very uncertain that sub-optimal suffering relief would prove sufficiently more workable as to end up leading to greater relief of suffering. For what level of certainty of future gain would we be prepared not to relieve at least some definite natural suffering now (i.e., in Utopia)? We would have to decide.

But, in the end, if optimal natural suffering relief now is too demanding to be workable, or at any rate to be sufficiently workable for our purposes, then this objection won't provide a reason not to employ the sub-optimal suffering relief strategy that seems to be the best investment of our resources. (8) And if this strategy is the best investment of our resources, it will eventually represent optimal suffering relief in practice, if not, at first, "on paper".

3. "Optimal natural suffering relief mightn't leave us time to be creative"

Near the beginning of this section, I countered the suggestion that it might appear there is no intrinsic point to animal lives. I said that although animals "set out", as it were, to live only in order to live, they might discover intrinsically worthwhile activities; activities to be pursued not in order to live, but for the sakes of the activities themselves. For example, animals play, or groom each other. Let's call these activities "creative", in the sense that they create purposes for living creatures over and above the somewhat circular purpose of mere survival. Of course, we humans have creative activities too, though our creative activities tend to spread over a rather wider range. The next objection to optimal natural suffering relief is this - mightn't such suffering relief prevent us humans from being creative with our lives? Mightn't it prevent us from having intrinsic point to our lives? Even if we had a little time and energy left over from optimal natural suffering relief, would it be enough to let us be creative in the above sense?

We could stop here for a moment, and point out that devotion to others, including devotion to animals' suffering relief, might be regarded as creative - after all, such devotion might give individuals a purpose over and above their own mere survival. But it might be argued in reply that optimal devotion to others doesn't properly use the individual's creative opportunity - it merely displaces that opportunity to the objects of devotion. They are now free to be properly creative, if someone is looking

after their basic needs for them. Or at least, it may be that what they do create is not now likely to be counterweighted, because a devoted suffering reliever is around to provide protection against any threat of awful suffering. But if in turn the objects of devotion displace their own creative opportunities by optimal devotion to still others, we are always going round in a circle, and no one can create a purpose outside this circle. We might as well all be devoted to our own mere survival.

Some feminists dislike what they see as the limited aspirations of some women simply to be good wives and mothers, always devoted to someone else and never wanting to create in their own right. Could optimal natural suffering relievers, or indeed any optimal suffering relievers, justifiably be seen as having limited aspirations? But an answer might start that yes, of course their aspirations would be limited. But what's our main question? Our main question, in effect, is whether optimal suffering relievers' aspirations would be morally limited. Now, could they be?

It is difficult to see how optimal suffering relievers could have aspirations that would be morally limited. The only way in which this criticism might apply might be in a contrived situation like that postulated above, where everyone is optimally devoted to others. Suppose that everyone knows that everyone else is optimally devoted to others, so everyone can see the circularity of purpose here. Having seen this futile circularity, how could people be happy? And if they couldn't be happy, wouldn't optimal devotion to others be morally limited?

But the thought may occur to us that if optimal devotion to others, or optimal devotion to suffering relief, is optimal devotion to animals, or optimal devotion to animals' suffering relief, then the above circularity of purpose is broken - because animals won't in turn be optimally devoted to others! For at least some of their time, they will be properly creative, even if their range of creative activities is narrow.

So, in Utopia, suppose optimal natural suffering relief occupies all our spare time. Animals' creative activities, like playing with and grooming each other, are less likely than ever before to be counterweighted by the violent or prolonged deaths from predation or starvation or disease that used to be routine. But we now have no time to be creative in our own right! This objection to optimal natural suffering relief seems to have massive intuitive force. But is the objection as strong as it seems?

Once again, we could use the previous thought experiment in which two technologically superior alien species arrive, and we need the first species to help us against the second. We'd rather, too, that the first species helped us optimally. But we hear one of its members saying to the others, "don't help humans to the extent that you have no time to be creative". The other members agree, so they fall short of helping us optimally. So more of us get eaten alive by members of the second alien species, in order that more members of the first alien species get time to be creative. Would this be a good thing? It doesn't seem so. But we seem to want something similar to be the deal where animals are involved.

Conclusion

We entered this section not having encountered an adequate objection to the principle of natural suffering relief. Now it emerges that, at least if we posit a situation where human realm suffering no longer exists, it is perhaps surprisingly difficult to find an adequate objection to the principle of optimal natural suffering relief, though the practice of optimal natural suffering relief might present more difficulties.

For us not to optimally relieve natural suffering would be more demanding for animals than optimal natural suffering relief would be demanding for us. And if we were in animals' places, we would justifiably reject the idea that time spent saving us from, say, being eaten alive would be better spent on "creative" activities, however creative these activities might be, even if we had only a narrow range of creative activities to offer in comparison, and even if we couldn't offer any reciprocal help to our helpers. We are led to the conclusion that, at least with no human realm suffering around, optimal natural suffering relief would be a good thing. Why, then, would it be entirely predictable that masses of people would absent themselves from natural suffering relief? I suggest that there would be no good moral reason - the reason would be, simply, that we humans are not very moral.

Notes

1. In the words of Eric Rakowski, "... the only sound reasons for inaction [now] are contingent ones". See Eric Rakowski, Equal Justice (Clarendon, 1991), p. 365.

2. Roslind Godlovitch, "Animals and Morals", in Stanley Godlovitch, Roslind Godlovitch, and John Harris (eds), Animals, Men and Morals (Gollancz, 1971).

3. Other philosophers may wish to replace my "... scenarios (1) and (2), and scenario (3) on projection (ii)" with "full compliance Rule Utilitarianism (or Consequentialism) under conditions of exhausting suffering relief workloads, and under Act Utilitarianism (or Consequentialism)".

4. Other philosophers may regard the foregoing subsection as a defence of both Rule and Act Utilitarianism (or Consequentialism) against a charge that, with big enough suffering relief workloads in the case of either, both moral codes could prove "too demanding to be reasonable".

5. Though of course, as I pointed out earlier, they wouldn't want instead to be eaten alive, starve to death, die slowly and painfully from untreated disease, etc.

6. Rule Utilitarianism (or Consequentialism) in suffering relief contexts has the advantage over Act Utilitarianism (or Consequentialism) that, with small enough total suffering relief workloads, it is less demanding on the individual, so likely to be more workable. But the advantage disappears, of course, if the total suffering relief workload is big enough.

7. Peter Singer, Practical Ethics (Cambridge, 1985), p. 179.

8. In fact, the objection will provide a reason to employ the sub-optimal suffering relief strategy that seems to be the best investment of our resources!

Part 3

Part 3

"ACCIDENTAL" HUMAN EFFECTS ON NATURAL SUFFERING

Realistically, it doesn't look likely that humans will ever be enthusiastic about deliberate, active natural suffering relief. It's hard to think even of passive, "laissez-faire" policies where humans have had natural suffering relief as a deliberate aim. But if deliberate natural suffering relief has been beyond us, "accidental" natural suffering relief is another matter. It's certain we've relieved natural suffering by trying to engineer or allow something else, and that we've relieved natural suffering simply by tolerating something engineered or allowed for another purpose. There's a lesson here. Deliberate, active natural suffering relief may not be our priority. But, in future, maybe we can at least deliberately and systematically encourage or allow human behaviour which accidentally relieves natural suffering, where before, perhaps, this behaviour would have been encouraged or allowed only contingently or expediently, for reasons other than for natural suffering relief. What about human behaviour which accidentally raises levels of natural suffering? Maybe we can deliberately and systematically discourage or cease to allow the human behaviour in question. But first we need to survey all the accidental human effects on natural suffering to see whether, considered separately, they can be thought of as good things, leaving aside the question of whether better things might replace them. The picture may be more complicated than we think.

Consider the following four accidental human effects on levels of natural suffering:

1. "Less suffering, no fewer lives"

Engineered or allowed depletions, or introductions, of species resulting in net loss in suffering, with no net loss in number of lives lived. (1) For example, farmers shoot wolves, or declining wolf population is let decline. Sheep no longer suffer from wolf predation. Humans kill sheep humanely instead, and more sheep get longer lives, produce offspring etc than wolves lose lives. Assume effects involving rival predators, prey populations etc don't make matters worse, in this classification.

2. "Extra suffering, no extra lives"

Engineered or allowed depletions, or introductions, of species resulting in net increase in suffering. No net increase in number of lives lived. For example, suppose cheetahs kill flamingos quickly. But then humans shoot cheetahs for the commercial value of their skins. Hyenas replace cheetahs as flamingo killers. Hyena numbers multiply (fewer starve - no competition to eat flamingos) and cancel out loss in cheetah numbers. But hyenas cripple flamingos to make them helpless, then often go away and don't kill them until a return visit. (2) So flamingo suffering increases.

3. "Extra suffering, extra lives"

As for (2), except that there is a net increase in number of lives lived. Suppose, for example, the amount of flamingo meat needed by the average hyena is less than the amount needed by the average cheetah. So more hyena lives are enabled than cheetah lives lost. How does "extra lives lived" trade off against the extra suffering these extra lives will bring?

4. "Less suffering, fewer lives"

Engineered or allowed depletions, or introductions, of species resulting in net loss in suffering. But also a concomitant net loss in number of lives lived. For example, reintroduced sparrowhawks kill bluetits quickly, thus "saving" the bluetits from starving slowly in winter. But of course, fewer bluetits! Perhaps, eventually, not enough bluetits to prevent sparrowhawk starvation.

Separate considerations of the four effects now follow.

1. Less suffering, no fewer lives

A welcome outcome. There may be some redistribution of suffering, if for example wolves suffer instead of sheep. However, if the end result is a new, sustainable suffering-reduced pattern with no net loss in animal numbers, this will represent an improvement on the previous pattern. But a problem might come with the means to the new outcome. There will have been no human altruism towards animals at work here. Species distributions will have changed because humans had, at least at one point, interests in making them change. Does the human-oriented, dubious motivation present a problem?

We encountered dubious motivation in Part 2, Section 1. Holmes Rolston (3) suggested that we follow nature, rather than presume to re-organise it. Even if our re-organisation appears to bring good consequences, our presumption could be dangerous. This presumption, a type of dubious motivation, could lead to worse consequences later. And so with all types of dubious motivation. Better that things are done, if done at all, with good motivation. So do we reject even suffering relief, in case we encourage the dubious motivation that might lie behind it? Approve of suffering relief only if the suffering relievers are bona fide?

But if dubious motivation does threaten to bring bad consequences in the future, then what we can do is resolve to be always on our guard, and if possible and necessary take preventive action nearer the time. But we

can often take advantage of dubious motivation now, if it brings suffering relief. Not to take advantage of dubious motivation might be, to repeat Peter Singer's words,

> ... refusal to prevent a definite evil for the sake of a very uncertain gain. (4)

The "definite evil" here would be suffering now. The "very uncertain gain" would be the possibility that we might help to encourage good motivation generally, either to bring good consequences or, for the non-consequentialist, because good motivation is an end in itself. But awful consequences can follow from obstinate refusals to accept help from those with impure motives. What if the democracies had refused to co-operate with the Soviet Union against Hitler, on the grounds that the Soviets had no intention of saving Eastern Europe for democracy? The cost of non-co-operation might have been to prolong Hitler's defeat, and to make a third world war (between the democracies and the Soviets) more likely. Would this cost have been worth it merely for the sake of setting high standards for the inclusion of other countries amongst one's allies?

2. Extra suffering, no extra lives

Now things start getting harder. "Less suffering, no fewer lives" was welcome. So, symmetrically, "extra suffering, no extra lives" must be bad.

To bring about this outcome in nature would facilitate natural suffering. Where then lies the problem? Can't we look at the cheetah and hyena example given earlier and disapprove of human hunting of cheetahs, if this entails the spread of the hyenas' particularly awful predation habits? We can. But the human race doesn't have much to lose here, all things considered. Much more problematic examples abound.

Suppose that whenever we build a road, we threaten a substantial depletion in the number of foxes. (They will be hit by cars.) So there will be fewer foxes to prey on rodents. Which predator takes over? Say it's the hawk, which is unlikely to be hit by cars, and which gives rodents slower deaths. In building a new road, we have "accidentally" facilitated natural suffering. Are we going to have to consult zoologists about every new road proposal?

"Don't facilitate natural suffering" wouldn't be such a conservative maxim as "don't tamper with nature". With the latter maxim it seems humans can never build anew or develop, lest we encroach further upon nature. With "don't facilitate natural suffering", further human development could be approved if it doesn't facilitate natural suffering, or brings net natural suffering relief. However, it will be asked, do we seriously even have to find out what the natural suffering permutations might be, every time we do things for our own purposes? The assumption behind this question is that side-effects on animals are of very negligible importance.

Of course, arguments can be put that building new roads, etc will facilitate human suffering, in the form of serious road accident casualties, for example. But suppose we're discussing proposed new housing, which could still threaten a few foxes with destruction under the wheels of dump trucks. The new housing could be luxury flats, so no suffering relief for the homeless would be involved. Here we have a case of proposed building, not for human suffering relief, but neither would it cause human suffering. (Objectors could say the builders' money could have been used for human suffering relief, but let's assume this would be economically counter-productive.) It will be asked, is it seriously suggested that increased natural suffering would be of sufficient moral importance for us to veto something (i.e. building luxury flats) that would make at least some humans more contented?

Confronted by powerful challenging intuitions, we might be inclined to an urgent review of all our options. They are:

1. Back off. Take the view that some happiness promotion (that of humans) morally outweighs some suffering relief (natural suffering relief).

2. Stick to our guns. Be some way as conservative and cautious in attitude to development, industrialisation, etc as was an extreme ascetic such as Mahatma Gandhi, if for rather different reasons.

3. Hold that while natural suffering relief is morally important, humans are morally underdeveloped, and the best we can hope for is that humans will support natural suffering relief which doesn't seriously threaten their own projects.

Option (3) has a precedent. Singer took an analogous position on Third World suffering relief. (5) Option (2) is honourable. Option (1) won't do, for conscientious believers in a suffering relief ethic.

For a suffering relief ethic, the promotion of happiness isn't morally symmetrical with suffering relief. No increased happiness can counterweight extreme suffering; say, from torture, being eaten alive, starving to death, dying slowly and painfully from untreated disease, etc. And not just human, or human-inflicted, suffering is morally important. If suffering is important, sufferers are important. Animals suffer. They can suffer at our hands, but they suffer naturally too. If we are concerned (at least a little) about suffering laboratory rodents, why not be concerned too (at least a little) about naturally suffering rodents? At least sufficiently not to allow their increased natural suffering, if we can stop this simply by going without something we don't really need anyway. For example, we could go without new luxury flats, if, say, we have old ones already, and construction of new flats would destroy quick killers of rodents and facilitate slow killers. Greater self-denial might indeed involve an austerity comparable to that of Mahatma Gandhi, but while this would be eccentric, how are we to rate it morally? Quite highly, it seems to me.

But perhaps we have to accept that the little humans do care about, say, rodents, might extend to undisputed examples of their suffering, such as in laboratories, but probably won't extend to cases where we might have to consult zoologists before knowing precisely how patterns of natural suffering might be changed by, say, development, or industrialisation.

3. Extra suffering, extra lives

The "less suffering, no fewer lives" outcome, discussed first, we saw might be sustainable, rather than just temporary. This might be because humans have an interest in keeping the numbers of a species stable at a certain level. The animals in question might, for example, be farm animals. The "extra suffering, no extra lives" outcome, discussed second, might be sustainable too. For example, new predators, bringing slower deaths than their predecessors, might, nevertheless, neatly fill the hole in the ecosystem left by human elimination of the old predators. But what if the new predators overfill the hole in the ecosystem? The new predators might need less prey meat per predator than the old predators did. Thus, the same number of prey animals, now suffering slower deaths, might provide meat for an increased number of predators. If so, we would have our third outcome, "extra suffering, extra lives".

Will the "extra suffering, extra lives" outcome be sustainable? In the above example the new predators' numbers might level off. Their numbers

might slightly overfill the hole in the ecosystem. But the numbers might be sustainable. But there may be other examples of "extra suffering, extra lives" which may not be sustainable. This is because, with "extra lives" comes the question of whether the environment can sustain these extra lives. If there are too many extra lives, the environment may not be able to support them. A case in point might be a situation in which a predator species had been depleted by human activity, but not been adequately replaced in the ecosystem. As a result, the prey animal population might grow so big that it would overgraze its habitat and exhaust its own food supply. After that a population crash would follow. "Extra lives" in the last example would apply for as long as the increased numbers of prey animals still totalled more than the numbers of lost predators. "Extra suffering" might be a concomitant effect for as long as increased numbers of animals were also suffering, before their deaths, from starvation. So here might be a temporary "extra suffering, extra lives" outcome. After a time, large numbers of starvation deaths, and fewer births, might lead to the final natural suffering outcome still to be discussed: "less suffering, fewer lives". "Less suffering" from now on, because fewer sufferers.

The upshot of the above discussion is that we might usefully consider the "extra suffering, extra lives" outcome under the heading of the "less suffering, fewer lives" outcome. Because "extra suffering, extra lives" in practice might lead to "less suffering, fewer lives". But if the environment can sustain "extra lives"? Then the value (if such it is) of "extra lives" still might have a theoretical symmetry with the disvalue (if

such it is) of "fewer lives". We might derive the value or disvalue of "extra suffering, extra lives" from knowing the disvalue or value of "less suffering, fewer lives". So let's move on.

4. Less suffering, fewer lives

This outcome doesn't only result from unsustainable prey animal population explosions. It's also an accompanying feature of what we might call "top-heaviness", as opposed to (temporary) "bottom-heaviness" in nature. "Top-heaviness" is when there are too many predators per population of prey animals. The prey animal numbers might have been depleted by human hunting. So already, "fewer lives"; and perhaps already "less suffering" too, if the prey animals died less painfully than they otherwise would have done, and such a decrease in suffering outweighed the increase in suffering due to predator starvation. But by the time large numbers of predators have starved, the outcome for the future in nature will certainly be "less suffering, fewer lives".

Human activity can also bring about "less suffering, fewer lives" in nature simply by destroying entire animal habitats. So fewer habitats to sustain future animal lives and future animal suffering. It is thought that the destruction of hedgerows by intensive modern farming has caused the decline in numbers of songbirds in Britain. But at least there will be fewer songbirds to routinely suffer from starvation in winter. (6)

Provisionally, let's be neutral as to whether "less suffering, fewer lives" in nature is good or bad. We see again that if human pursuits have side-effects on natural suffering, a problem might await, whether we deem side-effects good or bad. If the natural suffering outcome is good, we face the dubious motivation problem. Do we accept the natural suffering outcome, if it arises from human action dubiously motivated? For at the very least, the action won't have constituted human altruism towards animals. I responded to the dubious motivation problem earlier.

If the natural suffering outcome is bad, we might face the problem of whether to curtail activities which after all benefit humans. I suggested earlier that we may have to let some activities proceed. But we would here be regarding humans as morally underdeveloped, at least where natural suffering is concerned.

Earlier I compared one option - opposition to <u>any</u> facilitation of natural suffering - to the extreme asceticism of a figure like Gandhi. But I said <u>some</u> way as conservative towards development, etc, as the likes of Gandhi. Because <u>some</u> natural suffering side-effects of human development might be good ones. Here the human activities in question should be welcomed. They might include the spread of humane sheep farming. Now, if "less suffering, fewer lives" in nature is to be regarded as good, we see very clearly a parting of the ways with Gandhi. It would be good to proceed apace with intensive modern farming, if it brings "less suffering, fewer lives" in nature.

Are we going to declare in favour of "less suffering, fewer lives" in nature? If so, we will face both ridicule, and implacable hostility from those who will find our position morally repugnant.

In Part 1, we saw that Roslind Godlovitch (7) showed that any amount of natural suffering would lead us to value animals' lives negatively, unless we give the lives at least some positive value for some reason. This would be negative utilitarianism as applied to nature. Without positive value, animals' painless deaths, say from marksmen's bullets, would have to be regarded as a good thing.

If we favour "less suffering, fewer lives" in nature, we will have a "genocide problem" of our own. Animals' pleasures, considered apart from their suffering, would still fall under the heading "good consequences". But the problem is, nobody is interested in sifting out animals' pleasures from animals' suffering. So we have to decide whether animals' pleasures are worth animals' suffering. If the answer is generally negative, then "less suffering, fewer lives" outcomes from human effect on nature will tend to meet with our approval. "Painless" genocide in nature would certainly suggest itself as a possible remedy for cases of animals' suffering not outweighed by animals' pleasures.

Perhaps "painless" genocide in nature is pretty unlikely. But now things get worse. What if genocide in nature were to be not painless, just less painful than what otherwise would have happened to animals, considered

collectively? Would there be examples in history of what we might call net natural suffering relief genocide? For example, how are we to regard the cowboys' extermination of sixty million buffaloes over a ten year period in the mid-nineteenth century American West? (Of course, this example, and others, will be complicated by connected effects on humans. The American Indians suffered catastrophically from the loss of the buffaloes, which had been central to their way of life.)

It seems that a suffering relief ethic might feature a bizarre combination of responses to accidental human effect on nature. On the one hand, Gandhi-type austerity, in response to human activities where we might benefit at natural suffering expense. On the other hand, approval, possibly, where entire species are wiped out, or animal habitats (say, rainforests) systematically destroyed, taking natural suffering with them.

And put <u>accidental</u> human effect on nature on one side, briefly. Now imagine a man who couldn't persuade other people to anaesthetise natural suffering. This man gets sleepless nights, kept awake by thinking about unalleviated natural suffering. He could himself do some anaesthetising, in his spare time. But his efforts would be a drop in the ocean, and wouldn't outlast his own lifetime. Is there any significant or lasting natural suffering relief he can bring about, even if it's putting animals "out of their misery"? There is! He happens to be the captain of a nuclear submarine. He could blow up a whole offshore island full of naturally suffering seabirds. The island would sink, and never again support natural

suffering. No humans live on the island. Of course, a court martial would follow. But shouldn't the captain's act go down in history as a heroic example of deliberate natural suffering relief?

Simply by showing the apparently ridiculous questions, bizarre juxtapositions, and above all unthinkable thoughts connected with the above position, I have already sketched what seems to be an utterly damning prosecution case against it. Is there anything to be said for the defence?

We could usefully start with the thought that, in terms of natural suffering, animals' lives are very far from equal. At one end of the spectrum there are animals which, because they are huge (e.g. elephants), or inaccessible (e.g. they live in trees), just don't suffer much from predation. Also, some of these animals, particularly if they are big or don't get attacked, may live for decades, this without being nearly so prone to natural suffering as some other animals are.

At the other end of the spectrum there are animals whose natural suffering statistics are truly horrendous, even if we compare them with human suffering statistics in the Third World. Lion cubs die mostly from starvation: the mortality rate is eighty percent. (8) Cheetah cub mortality is ninety-five percent. (9) Average robins live one tenth of their potential lifespans. (8) For animals at the worse end of the natural suffering spectrum, life is well described by Eugene Hargrove:

> ... individual wild animals ... may be killed or eaten at almost any time. The only way to be reasonably sure that any particular animals will have an opportunity to live out a full lifespan is to remove them from their natural habitat and place them in an artificial environment - such as a zoo or park - where they are safe from predation and various other hazards. (10)

So there are animals which are particularly prone to natural suffering, and there are animals which are better able to resist, avoid or postpone natural suffering, maybe for decades. Would eventual starvation suffering, after a long suffering-free life, make this sort of life not worth living? If this sort of life looks, prima facie, worth living, then here perhaps is the thin end of a wedge. How many suffering-free years would qualify an animal for a life worth living? Where would be the cut-off point? What possible reason could be given for preferring one cut-off point to another point very nearby?

The problem of how to agree precisely on an "acceptable" level of natural suffering is probably beyond us, even if we can agree that at least some natural suffering is "not worth the candle". But a position, still a very radical one, that we could perhaps try to defend is that vast numbers of animals would probably be better off killed prematurely, but painlessly, by humans. If vast numbers of animals' lives are really as bad as that, then at least some unthinkable thoughts become thinkable.

How bad, then, are wild animals' lives? By what criteria do we measure them? Unfortunately, we can't of course ask animals themselves. So we have to make an assessment ourselves. An initial difficulty is that even suffering-free longevity, where animals are long-lived, may not after all provide the counterweight against eventual suffering that might make at least the lives of longer-lived animals worthwhile. Animals probably don't reflect much on past experiences. Probably, no matter how long-lived they are, their lives don't accumulate value to them - each day is day one. So why is one animal's suffering-free decade, followed by starvation, after all to be preferred to another animal's suffering-free year, followed by starvation?

Other things equal, creatures with short lives ahead of them needn't come to value their lives any less than creatures with long lives ahead would come to value theirs. (11) But perhaps we, from outside, have good reasons still to regard a long suffering-free animal life, ending in starvation suffering, as worthwhile, but a short suffering-free animal life, ending in starvation suffering, as not worthwhile.

What worthwhile something might be present in the pre-starvation lives of longer-lived wild animals that might not be present in the pre-starvation lives of shorter-lived wild animals? Something that longer-lived animals themselves wouldn't value, or perceive as an advantage. Something that could enable longer-lived animals to better withstand their eventual starvation suffering? It seems this factor has to be the key. But first we

will have to clear up a certain ambiguity in both the terms "longer-lived" and "shorter-lived". In absolute terms, animals of some species wouldn't live long even if we put them in Hargrove's "zoo or park". Even the potential lifespans of these animals are short. But, especially in a zoo or park, some of these animals might live long compared with other animals of their own species, which might routinely, in the wild, die much earlier - from predation, disease, or starvation. So "longer-lived" could mean "longer-lived of its kind", or it could mean "longer-lived absolutely". And so with "shorter-lived".

Already, with "longer-lived of their kind" animals, we see something obvious. It doesn't matter how short their lives are in absolute terms. They are adults. As such, they can often be untypical. It is overwhelmingly likely that any given dying lion, cheetah or robin (see earlier), dying from starvation, untreated disease or predatory attack, will be a child. In the human realm, we are particularly horrified and moved by the extreme suffering of children. It is very often with pictures of starving Third World children that charities like Oxfam and War On Want appeal to the hearts of people living in more affluent countries. Charities that are particularly successful in fund-raising are often child focused, e.g. The Save The Children Fund, The Children In Need Appeal, and a charity that even gets criticism from other charites for being too successful - The Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital Appeal. Britons have sometimes gone to extreme lengths just to "rescue" one child from a Romanian orphanage, or Bosnian battlefield. Often the thought behind child rescue is that children

are particularly defenceless against extreme suffering; particularly terrified by it. Adults may have come to be a little more hardened against suffering. Perhaps if any animals' extreme suffering can be said to be tolerable, it will be the suffering of fully grown animals.

Provisionally at least, let's concede even that all fully grown wild animals' lives, irrespective of the suffering of these animals, can be said to be worthwhile. That is, they wouldn't be better off killed prematurely, but painlessly, by humans. What now follows from this?

In some species, young animals may tend to survive longer than their fellows in other species, because they get better protection. Predatory big cats are much less likely to want to provoke a fight with the mother of a young rhinoceros than the mother of a young gazelle. (Even though lions, for example, successfully prey on fully grown buffaloes.) So again we have a range of natural animal experience - at one end, young animals with some chance of reaching adulthood, and with it, we hope, greater hardiness against eventual suffering. At the other end of the range, the routine, timeless, seemingly intractable feature of mass, violent infant mortality. It's here particularly where we are tempted to declare that animals would, on the whole, be better off not born at all. But we've provisionally said that, even here, the lives of animals which do reach adulthood will be considered worthwhile. So even if putting the youngsters out of their miseries, or preventing their conception, would be humane, what about the adults? Generally, what about the few or many animals, in any given

situation, which we might hesitate to declare "better off painlessly dead"? Or future animals whose lives we have implied would be worthwhile? Preventing conception of future young sufferers, say by declining to captive-breed an endangered species, would also prevent the conception of animal lives considered, by themselves, to be worthwhile. Actually, perhaps we don't have to be too bothered about which group are in the majority: whether it's the animals considered better off alive, or the others. After all, interests of any minorities are still morally important.

Barring human effect on nature, there will always be a high proportion of wild animals destined to be born into lives so nasty, brutish and short that, if they were humans, we wouldn't want to bring them into the world. There are only two sorts of change that will look likely. First, the relatively slow knock-on effects of piecemeal human erosion of one or two species, probably from commercial motivation, in a local ecosystem. The result might be, in the end, "less suffering, fewer lives" in that ecosystem. Second, the wholesale obliteration of local ecosystems. For example, the destruction of rainforests, test nuclear explosions on seabird-inhabited islands. Otherwise, the continuance and conception of worthwhile animal lives looks inextricably linked to the continuance of mass violent infant mortality, and nature's other horrors. Our problem then is, do we forever value the continuance of worthwhile animal life, forever at the cost of awful animal suffering? Or might we even think nature would be better off dead?

There are many examples we could find of positive consequences being inextricably linked to negative consequences. For example, we value motorways, but motorways feature horrific accidents. What we generally seem to think is that even appalling suffering is best endured, just to preserve the lives that will preserve the hope, somewhere, that things will get better. At least in the human realm. As Maureen Duffy said,

> We shrink from the thought that it would have been better for every Jew to be shot on arrest rather than endure the living death of the concentration camps. (12)

It might have been difficult to implement suffering relief deaths for concentration camp inmates, even from the perspective of anti-Nazis: say, Allied Bomber Command. But what if somebody had had godlike powers?

Imagine a semi-omnipotent God, "living" in 1943. He can't relieve suffering, except by painless killing of all sentient life on Earth - sufferers and non-sufferers alike. He would thereby also prevent conception of any future sentient life. But if he does nothing, millions of Jews will continue to suffer and die horribly. Also, for good measure, so will millions of Gulag Archipelago victims, Japanese P.O.W. camp inmates, and many, many, more. And animals, of course. And future sufferers. God's moral dilemma would be a variant on the traditional theological problem - would a good God have created a world with so much suffering in it? Even, perhaps, if no other world was possible?

We probably wouldn't much bemoan the deaths of Nazis and prison camp torturers. And camp inmates, and other actual or would-be sufferers, would have their suffering relieved or prevented if God decides on painless "apocalypse now". But what about present or future innocent, non-suffering creatures, human or animal? Why might they have to forgo their lives? Simply, it might be suggested, because their continued or created lives are or would be inextricably linked to an unacceptable price in suffering. Only God, in this example, can relieve the suffering quickly and painlessly. But in the example he has to sacrifice the lives of innocent non-sufferers too.

If God takes a moral decision to enact painless apocalypse, his decision won't in fact be entirely without related precedent. In fact, it is in wartime when related moral dilemmas often occur.

Suppose we are fighting a "just war". Or at least, it started out that way. Eventually comes a time when it is clear that some crucial objective is attainable only by military action that would have its cost in suffering, and also in innocent, presently non-suffering lives. (Or at least, tolerably-suffering lives.) Also, of course, this cost would entail a further cost: the prevention of future innocent, we hope non-suffering lives. But not to take the military action in question would almost certainly have worse consequences. Say, we would probably lose the war to a brutal and rapacious enemy which tortures any foreign or ethnic minority civilians it can lay its hands on.

In the last example, we would probably reluctantly conclude that some, even a vast number, of innocent non-suffering lives would have to be sacrificed. Innocent "enemy" civilians, and arguably innocent "enemy" conscripts, almost inevitably die in attempts to defeat their rulers' military might. Large numbers of future babies won't be born that otherwise would have been. And of course, all this applies to civilians and soldiers, and future babies, on our own side. Innocent non-suffering lives will be lost if we fight a war at all. But I hope we would at least be fighting a war to stop worse consequences. Analogously, God, in the previous example, could perhaps be seen as sacrificing innocent, non-suffering lives to prevent intolerable suffering. Even if this means sacrificing <u>all</u> life.

Back to "less suffering, fewer lives" in nature. I can't see that, for example, the seabird-inhabited island is necessarily better off before the Trident missile arrives. My view will appal most people, because we have an entrenched view that nature is not only a good thing, but a wonderful thing. This view is complacent; an example of absurdly wishful thinking. Look at what's actually happening in nature. Until we are more critical, huge percentages of young animals must routinely, as Hargrove said,

> ... starve to death so as to preserve the natural character of the landscape. (13)

But for obvious reasons, we may not, all things considered, want to encourage "nuclear" natural suffering relievers!

Conclusion

Let's first recapitulate all the evaluations, in Part 3, of accidental human effects on levels of natural suffering:

1. Less suffering, no fewer lives. Good.

2. Extra suffering, no extra lives. Bad.

We may want to be tentative in our evaluation of two other outcomes:

3. Less suffering, fewer lives. Perhaps good. Leading us to think:

4. Extra suffering, extra lives. (Where sustainable.) Perhaps bad.

Or we may yet want to go so far as to agree with the words of J. S. Mill:

> If a tenth part of the pains which have been expended in finding benevolent adaptations in all nature, had been employed in collecting evidence to blacken the character of the Creator, what scope for comment would not have been found in the entire existence of the lower animals, divided, with scarcely an exception, into devourers and devoured, and a prey to a thousand ills from which they are denied the faculties necessary for protecting themselves. (14)

From Parts 1 and 2, it emerged that only one adequate objection had been found to the principle of deliberate natural suffering relief - the contingent objection that, at present, suffering relief time and energy would be better spent, even if only as a better suffering relief investment, trying to relieve suffering in the human realm. But from Part 2, Section 3, it emerged that no adequate objection had been found to the principle of optimal natural suffering relief, should natural suffering ever come to constitute all suffering. So we have, it appears, no good moral reason to hold out indefinitely against deliberate, active natural suffering relief. But it also appears that we are not very moral; not moral enough, perhaps, ever to be enthusiastic about deliberate, active natural suffering relief. But our moral deficiencies certainly don't make a discussion of natural suffering relief entirely hypothetical - because "accidental" human effects on levels of natural suffering occur all the time. We can decide whether or not we think these effects are good things. Accordingly, we can either encourage or discourage them, or not stand in opposition to them if they are good, not participate in them if they are bad. I suggest that we start by drawing up a scheme of assessment of accidental human effects on levels of natural suffering like the scheme outlined in Part 3. I also suggest that we be prepared to do some hard thinking. For example, would we want to bring into the world a child which would probably barely pass its fifth birthday, and which would probably die either from being eaten alive, from starvation, or from painful untreated disease? Barring human effect on levels of natural suffering, comparable life chances await huge percentages of young animals.

Notes

1. Instead we could count animal life-years. So the loss of a young, potentially long-lived animal might equal the loss of two old, shorter-lived animals. Some health economists like the life-year measure, so, for example, the young diseased get priority over the old diseased. But the measure seems ethically dubious. I prefer to count lives lived. This means that loss of an elephant will equal loss of a mouse - rather counter-intuitive, but perhaps only because we find mice unattractive, and there are already more of them. I hope we wouldn't penalise humans for being dwarves, ugly or (e.g. Down's Syndrome) usually short-lived, or because we already have a "quota" of them.

2. Channel Four wildlife documentary, 13 October 1994.

3. Holmes Rolston, "Follow Nature?", Environmental Ethics, 1979, p. 25.

4. Peter Singer, Practical Ethics (Cambridge, 1985), p. 179.

5. Singer, op. cit.

6. Fifty percent of robins starve every winter. Stephen Bostock, Zoos and Animal Rights (Routledge, 1993), pp. 64-5.

7. Roslind Godlovitch, "Animals and Morals", in Stanley Godlovitch, Roslind Godlovitch, and John Harris (eds), Animals, Men and Morals (Gollancz, 1971).

8. Bostock, op. cit., pp. 64-5.

9. Channel Four wildlife documentary, 13 October 1994.

10. Eugene Hargrove, "Foundations of Wildlife Protection Attitudes", Inquiry, 1987, p. 23.

11. Partly why the life-year measure seems ethically dubious.

12. Maureen Duffy, Men and Beasts (Paladin, 1984), p. 90.

13. Hargrove, op. cit., p. 24.

14. John Stuart Mill, Three Essays on Religion (1875).